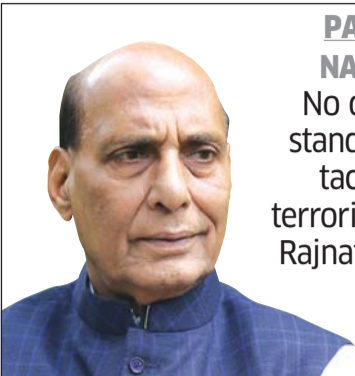


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'Nari Shakti' true strength of new India'

Amid political sparring, PM reiterates the Government's will to implement the quota, seeks public backing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Varanasi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday made a scathing attack on the Opposition especially the Congress, the Samajwadi Party, the Trinamool Congress and the DMK for obstructing the passage of the women's reservation bill. Addressing thousands of women at *Nari Vandana Sammelan* in Banaras Locomotive Works grounds, he said, "These *parivar-vadi* parties for their appeasement policies right from the beginning are opposing the women's 33 per cent reservation in seats in the Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabhas because they don't want to give a strong voice to half population of the country."



Prime Minister Narendra Modi plays football with young players during his visit, in Gangtok, Sikkim

PM Modi affirmed, "*Nari Shakti* (women's power) is the true strength of new India; when women advance, the entire society moves forward." Taking aim at the Opposition, PM Modi remarked that for a long period, women in the country remained neglected. He noted that, often, women were not even consulted; instead, decisions were simply imposed upon them. "The Opposition fears that if women enter politics in large numbers, their traditional brand of politics will

come to an end", the PM claimed, asserting that the philosophy of the BJP and the NDA is rooted in the principles of 'respect for *Nari Shakti*' and the spirit of '*Nagarik Devo Bhava*' (the Citizen is God). The PM called upon women to participate enthusiastically in this campaign to transform the nation into a developed country. Emphasising the point specifically, he affirmed that he would spare no effort in implementing women's quota. He said that he had come to seek the blessings of all the women present for the commencement of this endeavour. Paying homage to the women of Kashi, the Prime Minister declared that today's occasion is a celebration of the reverence and development of '*Nari Shakti*'. He noted that during

this event, various projects worth thousands of crores of rupees have been inaugurated or had their foundation stones laid, initiatives that will lend fresh momentum to the region's development. While in Varanasi, the PM inaugurated and laid the foundation stones for 163 development projects worth ₹6,322 crore. This included the dedication of 50 projects worth ₹1,054.69 crore and the laying of the foundation stones for 113 projects worth ₹5,277.39 crore. PM Modi also transferred a bonus of ₹105 crore to lakhs of milk-producing farmers across the State associated with Banas (Amul). The PM also flagged off two new Amrit Bharat Express trains virtually: Banaras-Pune (Hadapsar) and Ayodhya-Mumbai (Lokmanya Tilak Terminus). **CONTINUED ON >> P4**



Representative image WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Rail bomb plot foiled, four arrested in Punjab

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
New Delhi/Patiala

In a major breakthrough, Punjab Police on Tuesday cracked a Pakistan-backed, pro-Khalistan terror module responsible for a botched bomb attempt on a Dedicated Freight Corridor (DFC) railway track near Shambhu in Patiala district. Four highly radicalised operatives were arrested, and a cache of arms, explosives and communication devices was recovered, officials said.

The low-intensity blast occurred late on Monday night near Bothonia village on the Rajpura-Shambhu rail section (Shambhu-Ambala line). Police initially described it as a low-intensity explosion but later confirmed it was an attempted detonation of an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) that went off prematurely. One module member, Jagroop Singh aka Joopa (39), from Panjwar village in Tarn Taran district was killed on the spot while planting the device. **CONTINUED ON >> P4**

The Bystander



UAE EXITS OPEC ON RISING TENSIONS WITH SAUDI ARABIA

ASHOKE RAJ ■ New Delhi

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has announced its decision to leave the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). According to a report, the Gulf nation's energy minister said the move would give the country greater flexibility in managing its oil production, freeing it from the collective obligations imposed by the group. "This is a decision that we took after a very careful and long review of all our strategies," UAE's Energy Minister Suhail Al Mazrouei said. "The decision is taken at the right time in our view because it's not going to hugely impact the market: the market is undersupplied." He added that supply shortages linked to the conflict require faster responses to demand — something easier to achieve outside OPEC's collective framework. The departure follows prolonged friction with Saudi Arabia, OPEC's de facto leader, particularly over oil production strategies and regional influence. Disagreements between the two nations have surfaced repeatedly at OPEC meetings, where the UAE pushed to increase output using its expanded capacity, while Saudi Arabia advocated for tighter supply controls to stabilise prices. These disputes had previously brought Abu Dhabi close to exiting the alliance. **CONTINUED ON >> P4**



Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed al-Nahyan receiving Saudi Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman, in Abu Dhabi in 2021

Drug kingpin Salim Dola brought back



International drug trafficker Mohammed Salim Dola in NCB custody after he was brought back to India from Turkiye

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH ■ New Delhi

In a major anti-narcotics operation, the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) has brought back Mohammad Salim Dola, a key figure in international drug trafficking, from Turkiye. Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced the development on Tuesday, describing it as part of the Modi government's zero-tolerance policy against narco-syndicates. Dola (59) and the kingpin of notorious D Company's illicit drug syndicate, was arrested in Istanbul, Turkiye following an Interpol Red Corner Notice issued at India's request in March 2024. He was wanted in multiple cases under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act. The fugitive was flown back under 'Operation Global-Hunt' and taken into NCB custody upon arrival at Indira Gandhi International Airport, New Delhi, early Tuesday morning. "Under Modi government's mission to ruthlessly smash drug cartels, our anti-narcotics agencies have extended their claws across borders through a robust network of global agencies," Shah posted on X. "Now, no matter where they hide, no place is safe for drug kingpins," he added. **CONTINUED ON >> P4**

ATF price surge pushes airlines to edge

RAJESH KUMAR ■ New Delhi

The Federation of Indian Airlines (FIA), which represents Air India, IndiGo and Spicejet, in a letter dated April 26, to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, has warned that the aviation sector is facing "extreme stress" due to soaring Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF) prices. The group said the situation has practically made international operations, along with domestic operations, completely unviable and resulted in significant losses for the aviation sector in April. "Since ATF happens to be 30 per cent to 40 per cent of airlines cost, this unprecedented increase in ATF cost has moved the airlines operation cost from 30 per cent-40 per cent to 55 per cent-60 per cent creating completely non-operable conditions for airlines. Add to this, the Rupee has also depreciated further to its lowest level, adding additional burden on airlines in terms of ATF pricing," the letter read. The FIA flagged that airlines are struggling to absorb the increase, particularly on international routes, where fuel costs are higher and pricing flexibility is limited. Airlines also warned that sustained high fuel prices are beginning to strain cash flows, adding to financial pressure across the sector. Airlines have demanded reinstatement of crack band in line with pre agreed formula and reduction of VAT in key States and temporary deferment of excise duty on ATF. Crack band refers to a mechanism of ATF pricing that stops extreme differences between the price of crude oil and refined ATF. Also,



Representative image WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Airlines have requested rational ATF pricing, a temporary suspension of 11 per cent excise on ATF for domestic operations. "India's largest aviation hub — Delhi — has the second-highest VAT in India at 25 per cent. Tamil Nadu is highest at 29 per cent. Rates at other major aviation hubs of Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Kolkata range between 16 per cent and 20 per cent. These six cities cover more than 50 per cent of the airline operations within India. To ensure the uninterrupted operation of airlines within India... any ad hoc pricing (domestic vs international) and/or irrational increase in the price of ATF will result in unsurmountable losses for airlines and will lead to grounding of aircraft, resulting in cancellation of flights," the letter read. Last month, the government limited the hike in ATF price to ₹15 per litre for domestic operations, but for international operations, the price rose by ₹73 per litre. The letter signals a deepening crisis in India's aviation sector at a time when travel demand remains strong but cost pressures are intensifying. With fuel prices, taxes and geopolitical risks converging, the industry has sought swift government action to prevent disruption in flight operations and passenger connectivity. In India, airlines have so far absorbed part of the increase, but industry executives say there is limited room to continue doing so if costs remain elevated. For passengers, the implications are pretty straightforward. Higher fuel costs typically feed into ticket prices over time. Airlines may also reduce frequency on routes that become difficult to sustain. **CONTINUED ON >> P4**

PIONEER IN SHORT

SONAM RAGHUVANSHI GRANTED BAIL

The family of slain Indore resident Raja Raghuvanshi on Tuesday questioned the bail granted to his wife Sonam by a Meghalaya court, alleging she was the "mastermind" behind his murder and demanding a CBI probe. They said they would challenge the bail order in the Meghalaya High Court. Raja went missing on May 23 last year during the couple's honeymoon, and his mutilated body was recovered on June 2 from a gorge near a waterfall in Sohra, East Khasi Hills district. Sonam, along with several others including her alleged boyfriend, was arrested in connection with the case. Reacting to the development, Raja's mother Uma expressed shock over the court's decision, stating that the sudden grant of bail was difficult to understand.

SC: RTE CANNOT BE DENIED BY PVT SCHOOLS

The Supreme Court of India on Tuesday underscored that admission to pre-primary classes must be treated as a "national mission", ruling that neighbourhood schools are legally bound to admit students allotted by the State under the Right to Education Act, 2009 without delay. A bench of Justices PS Narasimha and Alok Aradhe held that refusal by private unaided schools violates the fundamental right to education under Article 21A of the Constitution of India. The court stressed that 25 per cent seats for weaker and disadvantaged sections under Section 12 of the Act has the potential to transform social equality. Dismissing an appeal by Lucknow Public School, Eidico, the bench upheld a high court order directing the school to admit a child allotted under the RTE framework for the 2024-25 session. The school had denied admission citing doubts over eligibility despite the student being on the official list.

Man in Odisha carries sister's skeleton to bank, sparks outrage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Bhubaneswar

A video and images showing a tribal man carrying his sister's exhumed skeleton to a rural bank in Odisha's Keonjhar district as proof of death in order to withdraw her money led to widespread public criticism and concern. Jeetu Munda (50), from Dianali village, sought to withdraw ₹19,300 from the Maliposi branch of Odisha Grameen Bank, where his late sister Kalra Munda (56) had an account. He told the media, "I visited the bank several times. Though I informed them of my sister's death, they kept insisting I bring her to the bank to withdraw the money in her name."

Munda dug up his sister's skeleton from the grave and carried it on his shoulder to the bank. Upon seeing the skeleton, the frightened bank officials immediately informed the local police. Following police intervention, the remains were taken back to the graveyard and reburied. According to bank sources, the nominee of Kalra Munda's account, her elder brother Raibu Munda, is also dead. Therefore, Jeetu Munda was the lone claimant over the money deposited in her name. Spurred into action by the widespread criticism, the Keonjhar district administration provided Munda with the death certificate of his sister and also ₹30,000 from the



Jeetu Munda carrying his deceased sister's corpse

District Red Cross Fund. He was also handed ₹19,300 deposited in the bank with interest. The district administration clarified that there are three legal heirs of Kalra Munda and the amount will be shared by the three. Netizens expressed their anger on various social media platforms over the lack of efficiency of the banking system, as well as the government stakeholders, and sought to simplify the process. Some of them also commented on the process of medical facilities during an emergency crisis. Odisha Congress's State unit, in a social media post, said, "This is truly unfortunate. Such harassment by bank officials must stop."

The rural bank Indian Overseas Bank (IOB) clarified that the "bank officials did not demand the physical presence of a deceased customer" for withdrawal. They sought valid documents, including the death certificate. "An individual, Mr Jitu Munda, visited the branch for the first time, requesting withdrawal from an account held in his sister's name, Ms Kalra Munda. As per banking regulations, third-party withdrawals are not permitted without proper authorisation. Upon being informed, he stated that the account holder was deceased. Our branch manager clearly explained that in the event of death, settlement can only be processed upon submission of

valid documents, including a death certificate. The individual, who was in an inebriated condition, became disruptive and later returned with human remains, reportedly exhumed after being buried a few days earlier, placing them in front of the branch and claiming it to be his sister while demanding withdrawal from her account. This created a highly distressing situation at the premises," the bank said in a statement. The district administration had earlier said that Jeetu Munda had not applied for a death certificate or legal heir certificate, nor had he sought assistance from the revenue inspector or any other administrative officer. **CONTINUED ON >> P4**

Sisodia refuses to pursue excise case before HC judge Sharma

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi

AAP leader Manish Sisodia on Tuesday made it clear that he will not appear in further proceedings before Delhi High Court Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma in the excise policy case. This comes a day after party chief Arvind Kejriwal similarly decided to neither appear in person nor appoint any lawyer for his case in Justice Sharma's court.



"I find myself in respectful agreement with the stand taken by him, which is based on Mahatma Gandhi's teachings on Satyagraha," Sisodia said. On Monday, Kejriwal wrote a letter to the high court judge after his plea seeking the recusal of Justice Sharma was rejected on April 20.

arising from your Ladyship's repeated public attendance of the Akhil Bharatiya Adhivakta Parishad, a lawyers' organisation publicly understood to belong to the RSS," the letter said. Sisodia further said, "The second is the issue arising from the professional engagement of your ladyship's children on multiple union government panels and the resulting appearance of closeness to the very law officers who now appear against me on the other side."

very threshold?" "That is the difficulty I face today. My concern too, much like Kejriwal's, is not born out of hostility to the court. It is born of a deep unease that, if I continue to participate despite these circumstances, I would be acting against my own conscience too while pretending before my fellow countrymen that all doubts stand resolved.

KEJRIWAL, SISODIA, OTHERS VISIT MAHATMA GANDHI'S MEMORIAL

New Delhi: After refusing to appear before a Delhi High Court judge in the excise police case, AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal, accompanied by Manish Sisodia and other party leaders, visited Mahatma Gandhi's memorial at Rajghat on Tuesday and said they prayed for strength to pursue the path of "Satyagraha" shown by Babu. The BJP hit out at the Aam Aadmi Party, saying the "drama company" should end its theatrics and allow the judiciary to do its job.



AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal pays homage to Mahatma Gandhi at Raj Ghat in New Delhi. "We respect the judiciary, but due to certain circumstances, we have to do this Satyagrah. I have mentioned all the details in my letter to the high court justice," Kejriwal told reporters at Rajghat.

राजीव गांधी प्रौद्योगिकी विश्वविद्यालय डिप्लोमा विंग, एयरपोर्ट बायपास रोड, भोपाल-462033 दूरभाष नं. : 0755-2583627, 2583673, फेक्स नं. : 2583656 E-mail : diplomawing@rgpv.ac.in

Inspired by PM Modi, Amit Shah: Maliwal on joining BJP

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi



Rajya Sabha MP Swati Maliwal on Tuesday said that her decision to leave AAP and join the BJP was voluntary and inspired by the work done by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah.

"I am deeply influenced by the historic work done for the nation by PM Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah. Taking inspiration from them, I have joined the BJP," Maliwal told reporters on why she joined the saffron party. Maliwal said that while working as chairperson of

for basic amenities during the AAP rule. In the last two years, the Rekha Gupta government has tried to resolve these issues," Maliwal said. She dubbed as "drama" Kejriwal announcing his decision not to appear in the excise case personally or through a lawyer before High Court judge Swarana Kanta Sharma and to follow the "path of Satyagraha". "Arvind Kejriwal is used to doing this 'drama', and it is nothing new. Because of this habit, not just Arvind Kejriwal, but the entire AAP is known across the country for its drama, lies, hooliganism and corruption."

Sachdeva urges party councillors to ensure cleanliness across city

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE New Delhi



Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva on Tuesday urged party councillors, in a meeting ahead of the April 29 mayoral polls, to ensure cleanliness across every street and road in the city.

14 MLAs nominated by the Delhi Assembly, seven Lok Sabha MPs, and three Rajya Sabha members from Delhi who will decide the mayor. A candidate requires 137 votes to win the election. The BJP has already fielded Pravesh Wahli, a seasoned three-term councillor from Rohini-East, as its mayoral candidate. With AAP opting out of the contest and the Congress nominating Haji Zarif, it is likely that the BJP candidate is going to sail through, as the incumbents hold the majority. With the recent induction of AAP's seven Rajya Sabha members into the party's fold, the BJP's sole

focus is on capitalising on its strengthened numbers in the 273-member electoral college. Going by current numbers, the BJP holds an edge with 143 votes, including 123 councillors, seven Lok Sabha and two Rajya Sabha MPs and 11 MLAs. The AAP has 105 votes, comprising 100 councillors, three MLAs, and two Rajya Sabha members, with Swati Maliwal recently quitting the party and joining the BJP. Within the saffron camp, senior leaders emphasised that the new Mayor would prioritise resolving the administrative deadlock and fast-tracking civic projects across the city.

Public Notice I, Shakuntala Devi, wife of Late Shri Ramesh Chand, aged about 64 years, resident of B-387, Gali No. 7, New Delhi, have Dissolved my son Deepak Kumar, his wife Geeta and daughter Arli Kumari from all my movable and immovable assets.

Public Notice Mr. Shrayan Lakshna, Mr. Keshav Lakshna & Mrs. Sonia Lakshna (vendees) have approached ICICI Bank Ltd., Laxmi Nagar, New Delhi (Bank) to take a loan for purchase of Property No. 142, (71.35 Sq. Mtrs.), Block-SH, Sector-145, Noida, Distt. Gautam Budh Nagar, U.P. from Mr. Rohan Tyagi (vendtor), who has represented that he is the sole & absolute owner of the said property by virtue of Transfer Deed dated 25.04.2013 (Doc. No. 3096).

Form no INC-26 [Pursuant to rule 30 the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014] Advertisement to be published in the newspaper for change of registered office of the company from one state to another Before the Central Government Northern Region In the matter of the Companies Act, 2013, Section 13(4) of the Companies Act, 2013 and Rule 30(6) (a) of the Companies (Incorporation) Rules, 2014

The Pioneer Classified CHANGE OF NAME I, Sadhna, W/o Chandan Kumar R/O Flat No 721, 7th Floor, Tower 7, Dream Homes Greenwood Enclave, Wave City, Ghaziabad UP-201002 have changed my name to Sadhana Kumari for all purposes.

I, hitherto known as PUSPA DHANIA W/O RAM KUMAR DHANIYA R/O H.NO-18/769, GALI NO-2, SIRASPUR, DELHI-110042 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as PUSHPA DEVI. I, Sunita Kumari, W/o No.15428409X Hav Bharat Singh Jat, Unit- Army Hospital R&R Delhi Cantt- 110010, have changed my name from Sunita Kumari to Sunita Kumari Jat, vide affidavit dated 28/04/2026 before Notary Public Delhi. I, Usha Kumari, W/o No.17004033F Nk Sanjay Kumar Verma, R/o- Vill- Kanaila, PO- Bisukia, Dist- Ballia, U.P.- 277503 have changed my name from Usha Kumari to Km Usha Verma, vide affidavit dated 28/04/2026 before Notary Public Delhi. I, Archana Vasantkumar Panchanbude W/o- No.15781201P Hav (Gnr) Panchabudhe Vasant Kumar, R/o- Vill- Mandhal, PO- Madgi, Teh- Tumsar, Dist- Bhandara, Maharashtra-441913, have changed my name from Archana Vasantkumar Panchanbude to Archana Vasantkumar Panchabudhe, vide affidavit dated 17/04/2026 before Notary Public Delhi. I, Munni Devi, Mother of- No.14866593P Nk Jitendra Kumar, R/o- Vill & PO- Bijrol, Teh & PS- Baraut, Dist- Baghat, U.P.- 250611, have changed my name from Munni Devi to Munni, vide affidavit dated 28/04/2026 before Notary Public Delhi. I, hitherto known as NISHA YADAV D/O BALBIR SINGH W/O NARESH KUMAR R/O H.NO. CW-62, SOHNA ROAD, NEAR CENTRAL PARK, MALIBU TOWN, ISLAMPUR(97), GURGAON, SOUTH CITY-II, HARYANA- 122018 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as AAYUSH. I, hitherto known as NISHA YADAV D/O BALBIR SINGH W/O NARESH KUMAR R/O H.NO. CW-62, SOHNA ROAD, NEAR CENTRAL PARK, MALIBU TOWN, VTC: ISLAMPUR(97), PO: GURGAON SOUTH CITY-II, GURGAON, HARYANA- 122018 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as NISHA. I, hitherto known as KULDEEP ALIAS KULDEEP BHARDWAJ S/O RAMESH CHANDER R/O HOUSE NO. 360A, BARWALA, NORTH WEST DELHI, DELHI-110039 have changed my name and shall hereafter be known as KULDEEP BHARDWAJ.

PUBLIC NOTICE NOTICE is hereby given that Jiwan Kansal claims to be owner and in possession of First Floor of Plot No. B-208, Block-B, Sector-8, Dwarka, New Delhi (hereinafter called the said property) by virtue of Gift Deed dated 04.01.2022 reg. vide Doc. No. 91 having gifted from Bimla Gupta and said Bimla Gupta inherited the said property after the death of Bhupendra Gupta by virtue of Relinquishment Deed dated 08.12.2021 reg. doc. no. 12334 & said Jiwan Kansal has agreed to sell the said Property to Paro Devi and said Paro Devi has agreed to create a mortgage in favour of our clients IDFC FIRST BANK LTD, Rajendra Place Branch, any person's having claim against the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, lien or otherwise howsoever, are hereby intimated to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 10days from the date hereof, failing which claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned and our client shall proceed with the disbursement of loan and subsequent creation of mortgage in respect thereof.

New Okhla Industrial Development Authority NOIDA E-TENDER NOTICE E-Tender are invited from firms/contractors registered with UPLC Lunker for the following jobs against which bids can be uploaded and same shall be opened/downloaded as per schedule mentioned. The details and conditions of all tenders are available on NOIDA Authority's official website: www.noidaauthorityonline.in & http://etender.up.nic.in. Please ensure to see these websites for any changes/amendments & corrigendum etc. 01/S.M.-JAL-IV.E.T./2026-27, Strengthening of Water Supply (Shifting of R. Well No.-11 Water Line from Green belt near Sector-157 due to construction of Major Underpass at Expressway Change 16.90 K.M.), Noida. Cost Rs. 84.21 Lacs 02/S.M.-JAL-IV.E.T./2026-27, Village Development (Augmentation of Old Sewer Line and Water Line at various places in Village-Gijhore), Noida. Cost Rs. 82.56 Lacs 03/S.M.-JAL-IV.E.T./2026-27, M/o W/s (S/F of Line Shaft Set at Network Sector-52, 53, 61 and Village-Gijhore), Noida. (For Two Years). Cost Rs. 73.97 Lacs 05/S.M.-JAL-IV.E.T./2026-27, M/o W/s (Repairing of AC/CI/PVC Water Line in Sector-20, 21, 25 & 26), Noida. (For Two Years). Cost Rs. 62.54 Lacs 04/S.M.-JAL-O.A./2026-27, O/M Sewer Line and MSPS/SPS at Expressway (Two Year repairing and Rewinding of 7590 HP Submersible Pump at IPS-7, Sector-129), Noida. Cost Rs. 58.71 Lacs Which can be uploaded by date:- 12.05.2026 upto 5.00 PM. Pre-qualification shall be opened/downloaded on date:- 13.05.2026 at 11.00 AM. General Manager (Jal) Noida CLEAN, GREEN, SAFE & SECURE NOIDA

ARIAS SOCIETY (An Autonomous Body of the Govt. of Assam) Project Management Unit of the Asian Development Bank financed Assam Sustainable Wetland and Integrated Fisheries Transformation (SWIFT) Project Agriculture Complex, Khanapara, G.S. Road, Guwahati-781022 (Assam, India) INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB) The Government of Assam through the Government of India has applied for a loan from the Asian Development Bank for the proposed Assam SWIFT project. The ARIAS Society now intends to apply a portion of the loan for the Conservation, Restoration and Rejuvenation works for the following IFB Nos. for bees in Nalbari, Sonitpur, Dibrugarh, Dhubri and Kokrajhar districts

Assembly passes censure motion against Opposition parties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Delhi Assembly on Tuesday passed a censure motion against the Opposition parties over the defeat of a bill seeking to amend the women's quota law in the Lok Sabha recently, with Chief Minister Rekha Gupta calling it "a black chapter of Indian democracy". Delhi has become the third BJP-ruled state — after Haryana and Madhya Pradesh — to convene a special session debating the women's quota law.

The Chief Minister, who moved the motion in the special session of the Assembly, slammed the Opposition for pursuing "narrow political gains" and "conspiring" to defeat the Bill, which was passed with a voice vote in the House.

Addressing a one-day special session of the Delhi

Assembly, the Chief Minister said April 16, 17 and 18 would be remembered as a 'sad chapter' in the history of Indian democracy. During those days, women across the country were watching Parliament with hope that their 78-year-long wait for representation would finally end. However, the discussions held during that period only led to disappointment. The Aam Aadmi Party walked out during the discussion, alleging that they were not allowed to speak freely.

In a scathing attack on the Opposition parties, the chief minister said that their leaders stooped low while opposing the women's quota bill for women and started talking nonsense.

She also slammed women leaders, including West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi, accusing them of adopting an anti-



(Left) Chief Minister Rekha Gupta speaks during the one-day special session of the Legislative Assembly; (right) Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with BJP leaders takes part in a protest rally over "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam" in New Delhi



(Left) Chief Minister Rekha Gupta speaks during the one-day special session of the Legislative Assembly; (right) Chief Minister Rekha Gupta with BJP leaders takes part in a protest rally over "Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam" in New Delhi

women stand. "Priyanka Gandhi gave the 'Ladki Hun Lad Sakti Hun' slogan and ran away herself when the women were fighting for their rights," she said.

The chief minister said the women were looking up to Parliament, hoping to end their wait of 78 years, but the Opposition was bent on defeating the bill. "It was a

Women's Reservation Bill was introduced in Parliament seven times over 27 years but was blocked each time. Several political parties created obstacles and confined women to limited roles, whereas the BJP provided them opportunities to move forward.

The Chief Minister said the time has come for women to

stand up for their rights. "No more appeals this will now be a battle, a decisive struggle," she said, adding that women have long witnessed tokenism and political manoeuvring without real justice. She said women across the country are now capable of fighting their own battles and are moving forward with unity.

The Chief Minister criticised the use of the term 'satyagraha' to evade judicial processes, calling it a misuse of Mahatma Gandhi Ji's ideology. She said presenting oneself above the law reflects a serious contradiction, and resistance to accepting judgments delivered by women judges points to a deeply ingrained anti-women mindset.

Speaker Vijender Gupta claimed that every opposition member was given time, and they "created drama" by walking out to avoid listening to the ruling members. In a mark of solidarity with women, the Speaker invited BJP MLA Shikha Roy to conduct the House proceedings for some time.

The Centre, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, brought amendments in the 'Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam' to ensure enhanced representa-

tion of women in the state legislatures and the Parliament by 2029, but the bill was defeated. In the past 27 years, the Bill for increased representation of women was tabled in the Parliament seven times, and the Opposition parties always defeated it, she said.

The chief minister also said that the Leader of Opposition in the Assembly, Atishi, did not speak on the issue and claimed there must be some "conspiracy" behind it, sympathising with her for surviving in the AAP with difficulty.

Earlier in the day, the chief minister led a protest by the ruling BJP MLAs in the Assembly premises over the defeat of the women's quota bill. The BJP MLAs and ministers wore black armbands in the House, expressing their protest against the defeat of the bill. Both the BJP and AAP MLAs traded charges during the discussion.

Speaker Gupta calls Assembly's special session question of dignity for half of India's population

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The special session of the Delhi Assembly is not merely a matter of legislative procedure but a question relating to the dignity, rights and representation of half of the country's population, Speaker Vijender Gupta said on Tuesday.

Making this assertion on the commencement of the session to discuss the Women's Reservation Bill, known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, which was recently defeated in the Lok Sabha, he also said history bears witness that major decisions relating to social justice sometimes take time, but public support and sustained efforts ultimately



Speaker Vijender Gupta speaking during the special session.

pave the way for change. Gupta said we have assembled to deliberate on an issue that is not merely a matter of legislative procedure but a question relating to the dignity, rights and representation of half of the country's population.

In the Special Session of the Lok Sabha, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, relat-

ed by the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, discussions were held on 16 and 17 April 2026.

The debate continued for 21 hours and 27 minutes, and 131 members participated in the discussion on the three bills in the Lok Sabha. It was further stated that it is unfortunate that even after such extensive discussion, the Constitution Amendment Bill was not allowed to be passed.

This was an occasion when history could have been created, when India's democratic system could have been made more inclusive. It was a moment when we could have taken a decisive step to ensure a strong and equality-based political framework for future generations, Gupta said.

Hansraj College reviews suspension of 30 students

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

A day after students protested at Delhi University's (DU) Hansraj College over suspension notices issued to 30 students, a core disciplinary committee meeting was held on Tuesday to reconsider the suspension letter, according to college officials.

The college administration had suspended 30 students through five letters issued from April 20 to April 25, for various reasons, ranging from alleged violence and misconduct during the college fest to being involved in "acts of defaming the college through social media platforms."

"The core disciplinary committee held a meeting on Tuesday, and the suspended students were allowed to present their sides. Based on the minutes of the meeting,



the decisions will be taken on Wednesday," a college official said. At least 18 students out of the total 30 were suspended for a "serious incident of violence, misconduct and breach of discipline that occurred within the college premises during the Annual Fest on 8th and 9th April."

The last two letters, dated April 23 and April 25, suspended 11 students. The April 23 notice suspend-

"In view of the serious incident of violence, misconduct and breach of discipline that occurred during the Annual Fest...the following office-bearers of the Hansraj College Students' Union are hereby placed under suspension with immediate effect, pending disciplinary proceedings," the notice mentioned.

Meanwhile, acting on a complaint by the administration, Delhi Police has registered an FIR in the Hansraj clash during a college festival. "Preliminary reports indicate incidents of violence and the alleged entry of outsiders during the event. The case has been registered under multiple sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita," said a senior police officer, adding that no arrests have been made so far, as police are continuing to verify facts and examine the circumstances.

Staff association of DU's Dyal Singh Evening College holds fresh protest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The staff association of Delhi University's Dyal Singh Evening College held a fresh dharna on Tuesday after a scheduled staff council meeting to discuss the proposed name change of the institute was not convened.

The protesters urged the college administration to convene the staff council meeting immediately. Earlier, the college's principal had written to Vice Chancellor Yogesh Singh, seeking directions to hold a staff council meeting one day ahead of the university's Executive Council meeting.

However, the protesting staff association termed it a "delaying tactic". "The staff council is a statutory body of the college, as per the provided provi-



sions. It serves a similar purpose for the college as the Executive Council (EC) serves for the university. So the college does not need to seek directions to call a meeting for the council," a college professor who was part of the protest said, requesting anonymity.

"This is a way to delay calling a meeting. We will continue the dharna on Wednesday as well, as the staff council meeting is scheduled to happen on Wednesday," the professor added.

The professor also expressed apprehension that a last-minute discussion on the name change might still be done at the Executive Council meeting, despite the agenda item being absent.

The demonstration comes amidst opposition to the vice chancellor's announcement in December 2025 about the possibility of renaming the evening college after Sikh warrior Banda Singh Bahadur.

It is currently named after Sardar Dyal Singh Majithia, a 19th-century philanthropist, educationist, and social reformer. On April 23, the college's staff association submitted a memorandum, reiterating that despite repeated requests to convene a meeting, the college administration did not heed their requests.

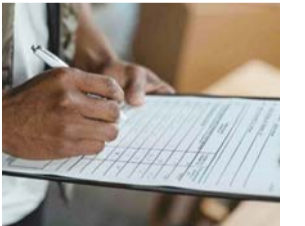
142 guest teachers face termination for refusal to perform census duty

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The district magistrate of Old Delhi has asked the director of education to terminate the services of 142 guest teachers for allegedly refusing to perform their statutory duty as census enumerators, terming the act "gross negligence and indiscipline".

In a letter to the director of education dated April 24, the magistrate said, "The teachers declined to carry out assigned census work despite an earlier communication issued on April 16 highlighting the difficulties caused by their unwillingness to participate in the exercise."

Commenting on the issue, Delhi Education Minister Ashish Sood said that the census is a matter of national importance which everyone should support. "We will look into the matter and consider the special cases sympathetically," Sood said.



The magistrate said the refusal amounted to gross negligence and dereliction of duty and was detrimental to public interest.

"It is being informed that 142 guest teachers have refused to perform the above-mentioned duty. The list is attached for reference," the letter said.

The magistrate requested that their services be discontinued or terminated with immediate effect, saying that tolerating such acts of indiscipline could affect other staff members currently engaged in census duty.

He also said that allowing such non-compliance could disrupt the census process and weaken discipline

among the employees performing the same statutory responsibility. However, the teachers claimed that they have not received any termination letter yet.

Meanwhile, the Government Teachers Association (GTA) of Delhi has requested Sood to withdraw the proposed termination of the guest teachers.

GTA general secretary Ajay Veer wrote to Sood that all the concerned guest teachers are working on annual contracts, which are scheduled to expire on May 8.

He said there had been no increase in the daily remuneration of guest teachers for nearly eight years, and the existing amount was insufficient even to meet basic expenses such as commuting.

FUNDING & SECURING INDIA'S ENERGY FUTURE

Extract of Audited Financial Results (Standalone & Consolidated) for the Three Months and Year ended 31-03-2026

Sl. No.	Particulars	Standalone				Consolidated					
		Three Months Ended		Year Ended		Three Months Ended		Year Ended			
		31-03-2026 (Audited)	31-12-2025 (Unaudited)	31-03-2025 (Audited)	31-03-2026 (Audited)	31-03-2026 (Audited)	31-12-2025 (Unaudited)	31-03-2025 (Audited)	31-03-2026 (Audited)	31-03-2025 (Audited)	
1.	Total Income from Operations	14,386.01	14,944.26	15,159.44	59,139.96	55,911.12	14,563.82	15,051.08	15,333.54	59,584.16	56,366.55
2.	Net Profit for the period (before Tax, Exceptional and/ or Extraordinary items)	4,397.09	5,116.40	5,384.67	20,713.19	19,859.78	4,414.54	5,154.71	5,489.89	20,784.61	20,117.47
3.	Net Profit for the period before tax (after Exceptional and/ or Extraordinary items)	4,397.09	5,116.40	5,384.67	20,713.19	19,859.78	4,414.54	5,136.43	5,489.89	20,766.33	20,117.47
4.	Net Profit for the period after tax (after Exceptional and/ or Extraordinary items)	3,362.30	4,043.08	4,236.20	16,282.26	15,713.21	3,375.08	4,052.44	4,309.98	16,308.17	15,884.23
5.	Total Comprehensive Income for the period (Comprising Profit for the period (after tax) and Other Comprehensive Income (after tax))	315.47	4,719.20	3,186.06	12,115.91	14,196.41	328.25	4,728.56	3,259.84	12,141.82	14,367.43
6.	Paid up Equity Share Capital (Face Value ₹10 per share)	2,633.22	2,633.22	2,633.22	2,633.22	2,633.22	2,633.22	2,633.22	2,633.22	2,633.22	2,633.22
7.	Other Equity	81,657.19	83,629.26	75,004.75	81,657.19	75,004.75	82,421.19	84,380.47	75,742.84	82,421.19	75,742.84
8.	Securities Premium Account	1,577.53	1,577.53	1,577.53	1,577.53	1,577.53					
9.	Net Worth	84,290.41	86,262.48	77,637.97	84,290.41	77,637.97					
10.	Paid up Debt Capital/ Outstanding Debt	5,05,777.41	4,98,828.24	4,88,258.52	5,05,777.41	4,88,258.52					
11.	Debt Equity Ratio *	6.00	5.78	6.29	6.00	6.29					
12.	Earnings per Share (of ₹10 each) (for continuing and discontinued operations) (in ₹)										
(i)	Basic	12.64	15.35	15.96	61.71	59.55	12.69	15.39	16.24	61.81	60.20
(ii)	Diluted	12.64	15.35	15.96	61.71	59.55	12.69	15.39	16.24	61.81	60.20

* Debt/Equity Ratio = Net Debt / Net Worth (Net debt represents principal outstanding less cash and cash equivalents available.)

Notes:

- The above standalone financial results of the Company were reviewed by the Audit Committee and approved and taken on record by the Board of Directors at their respective meetings held on April 28, 2026. These results have been audited by the Joint Statutory Auditors of the Company.
- The above is an extract of the detailed format of Quarterly Financial Results filed with the Stock Exchanges under Regulation 33 & 52 of the SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015. The full format of the financial results is available on the Stock Exchange websites (www.bseindia.com and www.nseindia.com) and also on the Company's website (www.recindia.nic.in).
- For other applicable disclosure as required under regulation 52(4) of SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, refer detailed format of the financial results filed with the Stock Exchange (www.bseindia.com and www.nseindia.com) and can also be accessed on the Company's website (www.recindia.nic.in).

FINAL DIVIDEND

The Board of Directors of the Company at its meeting held on April 28, 2026, has recommended final dividend of ₹1.55/- per equity share (on face value of ₹10/- each) subject to the approval of shareholders in the ensuing Annual General Meeting of the company. The total dividend per share (including proposed final dividend) for the financial year 2025-26 is ₹18.55/- per equity share.

For REC Limited (Jitendra Srivastava) Chairman & Managing Director DIN - 06817799

Place: Delhi Date: April 28, 2026

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Registered Office: Core-4, SCOPE Complex, 7, Lodhi Road, New Delhi -110003 | Tel: +91-11-43091500
E-mail: contactus@recindia.com Website: www.recindia.nic.in, CIN: L40101DL1969G0I005095

Scan this QR code to download the Financial Results

IN FOCUS



White tigers cool off in a water pool at the National Zoological Park amid a heatwave in New Delhi on Tuesday

BJP wins Gujarat local body polls with huge margin

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Gandhinagar

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has registered a resounding and sweeping victory in the Gujarat local self-government elections, capturing nearly 75 per cent of the total seats and leaving the opposition parties significantly weakened across the state.

Out of 9,992 seats contested in local bodies, results for 9,943 seats have been declared so far. The BJP has secured a massive 7,462 seats, while the Indian National Congress managed only 1,732 seats. Other parties collectively won 749 seats, underscoring the BJP's overwhelming dominance in Gujarat's political landscape.



BJP supporters celebrate the results of the local body elections, in Rajkot, Gujarat, on Tuesday

In the municipal corporations, the BJP won 937 out of 1,044 seats, with Congress securing 95 seats and others just 12. In municipalities, BJP captured 1,989 out of 2,624 seats, while Congress won 258 and others 177. At the district panchayat level, BJP bagged 891 of the 1,088 declared seats, leaving Congress with 136 and others

with 61. Similarly, in taluka-panchayats, BJP secured 3,645 out of 5,187 declared seats, while Congress got 1,043 and others 499.

The victory celebrations erupted at the BJP state headquarters 'Kamalam' in Gandhinagar, where Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel,

state BJP president Jagdish Vishwakarma, and Minister of State for Home Harsh Sanghavi joined party workers in jubilant celebrations, likened to a festive Diwali atmosphere.

Addressing party workers, CM Bhupendra Patel termed the mandate a "victory of development," stating that the people of Gujarat have once again endorsed the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and rejected negativity. He credited teamwork and sustained grassroots outreach for the party's success.

Harsh Sanghavi, in a sharp remark aimed at opposition parties, said that voters have given a befitting reply to those who attempted to malign Gujarat and its citizens, adding that the victory reflects the tireless efforts of

party workers, especially during crises like the COVID-19 pandemic and natural calamities.

State BJP president Jagdish Vishwakarma also took a swipe at rival parties, calling them "seasonal players" and asserting that the electorate has firmly endorsed the BJP's development agenda.

Political observers have attributed the landslide victory to the BJP's robust booth management and extensive grassroots campaign. The party reportedly conducted over 1.05 lakh group meetings and 30,000 social interactions, focusing on direct voter engagement and localised development report cards.

The BJP's dominance was particularly evident in urban centres. In the Surat Municipal Corporation, the

party achieved a historic feat by winning 115 out of 120 seats, leaving the Aam Aadmi Party with just 4 seats and Congress with a single seat. This performance echoes the party's near-clean sweep in 1995 and highlights its continued stronghold in the region. Experts believe that the results reaffirm the BJP's entrenched position across Gujarat, not only in cities but also in rural local bodies, making it increasingly challenging for opposition parties to regain political ground in the state.

With this decisive mandate, the BJP has once again cemented its status as the dominant political force in Gujarat, while raising serious questions about the future and relevance of the opposition in the state's political arena.

Rajnath, Chinese counterpart discuss LAC peace in Bishkek

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday met his Chinese counterpart, Admiral Dong Jun, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, to discuss maintaining peace and tranquillity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and broader regional security concerns.

The meeting, held on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' conclave, came as New Delhi and Beijing move to repair their frosty relations.

"It was a pleasure to interact with the Defence Minister of China, Admiral Dong Jun, during the SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting in Bishkek," Rajnath Singh said on social media without mentioning the issues discussed.

It is learnt that Rajnath Singh and Dong discussed the situation along the LAC, underlining the importance of maintaining peace and tranquillity in the border areas, as well as regional security issues.

It is not immediately known whether the West Asia crisis figured in the talks. The meeting came amid



India and China looking at rebuilding their frosty relations.

In the last few months, both sides have initiated a series of measures to reset their ties that came under severe strain following the deadly clashes between Indian and Chinese troops in Galwan Valley in June 2020.

Following a series of diplomatic and military talks, the two sides withdrew their troops from several friction points along the LAC in eastern Ladakh.

In October 2024, the two sides firmed up a disengagement pact for Depsang and Demchok, the last two friction points in eastern Ladakh.

Days after the agreement was finalised, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping held talks in Kazan and took a number of decisions to improve the ties.

Impartiality in police recruitment was distant dream 9 years ago: CM Yogi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Lucknow

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday said the impartiality with which police recruitment is conducted now was a distant dream nine years ago, alleging discrimination and irregularities in the recruitment process by the previous government.

Addressing an event where appointment letters were distributed to candidates selected as head operators in the Uttar Pradesh Police Telecommunications Department, at the Indira Gandhi Pratishthan here, Adityanath emphasised that fair recruitment was now the norm, conducted solely based on merit, capability,



and adherence to reservation provisions, according to an official statement.

"An environment has been fostered in the state where, if you possess the capability, no one can stop you from moving forward," he said.

"The impartiality with which police recruitment is conducted now would not have been possible nine years ago. Previously, the process

itself was not conducted smoothly. There was discrimination in appointments. However, now, throughout the entire process, no one needs recommendations or money," he said, in a veiled jibe at the previous dispensation. Adityanath said a passing-out parade for 60,000 police constables was held across 112 centres in the state on Sunday.

Light rain brings relief from North India heatwave

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

After days of scorching heat, several parts of north India on Tuesday witnessed a slight dip in maximum temperatures as light rain, accompanied by gusty winds and thunderstorms, hit most places in Punjab and Haryana, while Delhi readied for similar conditions for the coming days, IMD data



showed. In Rajasthan too, the maximum temperature dropped by 1 to 2 degrees Celsius in many parts due to

an active western disturbance and easterly winds, though parts of Uttar Pradesh continued to bake under the scorching sun as heatwave conditions persisted across many regions of the state.

A cyclonic circulation over central Pakistan, north-west Rajasthan, Punjab and Haryana is currently active and moving towards north-east India, driving the change in weather, the IMD said.

In Delhi, people are likely to see a respite from searing heat that pushed temperatures beyond the 40-degree mark as rain, thunderstorms and gusty winds are expected to hit the capital from Tuesday night and continue for the next few days.

The city saw a slight dip in temperatures on Tuesday as the maximum settled at 39.2 degrees Celsius. On Monday, Delhi recorded its second-

hottest day in April with a high of 42.3 degrees Celsius. Parts of Delhi also witnessed light precipitation during the day, with Palam and Lodi Road recording trace rainfall between 8.30 am and 5.30 pm.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast thunderstorm activity accompanied by gusty winds and issued a 'yellow' alert for Wednesday.

Sonom's bail in Meghalaya honeymoon murder case sparks CBI demand

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Indore

The family of slain Indore resident Raja Raghuvanshi on Tuesday sought to know how his wife Sonam was granted bail by a court in Meghalaya despite she being the "mastermind" of his murder, and demanded a CBI probe into the case.

Seeking justice, they said they



will move the Meghalaya High Court against the lower court's decision to grant bail to Sonam.

Raja Raghuvanshi went missing on May 23 last year during the couple's honeymoon, and his mutilated body was found on June 2 from a deep gorge near a waterfall in Sohra area of East Khasi Hills district. Sonam and several others, including her alleged boyfriend, were arrested in the case.

A court in Meghalaya on Tuesday granted bail to Sonam.

Talking to reporters, Raja's mother Uma, who was choked with emotion, said she couldn't understand how Sonam was granted bail despite being the "mastermind" of her son's murder. "The Meghalaya Police thoroughly investigated the case over the past nine months, but it was beyond our understanding how

the game suddenly changed in a month or two," she said.

"We only demand one thing from the government - justice for my innocent son, who was murdered. I want a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) probe into this case," she added. Vipin Raghuvanshi, Raja's elder brother, said his family will challenge the lower court's decision to grant bail to Sonam in the Meghalaya HC.

J&K gets ₹8,000 crore projects

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Jammu



Union Minister for Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare and Rural Development, Shri. N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Tuesday said that projects worth nearly ₹8,000 crore have been approved for the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, which is a historic achievement in a single year.

Attending a gathering at Sher-i-Kashmir International Conference Centre, the Union Minister handed over the sanction letter of PMGSY-IV (Batch II) package worth ₹3,566 crore to the Chief Minister Omar Abdullah.

FROM PAGE - 1

remarked that Narendra Modi has accorded the country's female population a level of respect that previous governments failed to provide. He noted that the government has taken several historic steps with women's empowerment at their very core. The conference was also attended by Governor Anandiben Patel, Union Minister of State for Finance and state BJP chief Pankaj Chaudhary, and Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya, along with over 40 corporators and women representatives.

Rail bomb plot foiled, four arrested in Punjab

Addressing a joint press conference, DIG Patiala Range Kuldeep Singh Chahal and SSP Patiala Varun Sharma announced that the case was solved within hours through technical surveillance, forensic analysis of a recovered SIM card and mobile phone and coordinated raids. The module was allegedly directed by handlers based in Malaysia with direct links to Pakistan's notorious spy agency Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and aimed to carry out multiple strikes on public infrastructure across Punjab to spread panic and stall development.

All four arrested accused are described as habitual offenders with multiple criminal cases against them. They have been identified as Pardeep Singh Khalsa, Kulwinder Singh alias Bagga, Satnam Singh alias Satta and Gurpreet Singh alias Gopi.

Pardeep Singh the kingpin of the module is from Mansa district. Investigations have revealed that he formed a radical outfit called Chalda Vaheer Chakarwari, Attari, maintained close contact with a Malaysia-based pro-Khalistan terrorist and coordinated with Pakistan-based arms suppliers. He allegedly recruited and sent

radicalised youth abroad for training.

Investigations suggest Jagroop Singh had travelled to Malaysia in 2019 and was part of the same network. One more accomplice is believed to have been present at the site and is being traced. The accused have been booked under the stringent Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and will be produced in court shortly. Police have sought their remand for intensive interrogation. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) is expected to take over the probe given the cross-border terror angle.

DIG Chahal appealed to Punjab's youth: "Those sitting abroad ensure a secure future for their own children but mislead our youth here. Jagroop Singh had two minor daughters and such actions have destroyed an entire family." He warned against falling prey to foreign inducements. Earlier, rail traffic on the affected section was briefly halted as a precaution but has since been restored. No passengers were injured in the incident. This is the second suspected sabotage attempt on Punjab railway tracks in recent months, underscoring heightened security concerns ahead of key developments in the state. Investigators are examining possible connections to an earlier blast on January 23-24, 2026, near Sirhind in Fatehgarh Sahib district, some 40 km away. That incident damaged a freight track and engine, injured a loco pilot, and was claimed by the banned Khalistan Zindabad Force (KZF) via a social media letter calling it a trailer ahead of the 40th anniversary of the Khalistan declaration.

The incident has drawn sharp political criticism. Congress leader Amarinder Singh Raja Warring accused the AAP government of failing to safeguard hard-earned peace, claiming administrative lapses are allowing criminals to operate. As of now, the investigation is continuing with senior officials of Punjab Police claim-

ing that the scope of the probe has been expanded and more arrests are likely.

Drug kingpin Salim Dola brought back

The Ministry of Home Affairs stated that the operation reflects the government's firm resolve, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and guidance of Home Minister Amit Shah, to pursue narcotics fugitives and organised crime syndicates globally.

"The successful return of Salim Dola demonstrates that no criminal is beyond the reach of Indian law enforcement," the ministry said. This extradition is the latest in a series of cross-border actions by Indian agencies targeting drug lords who had long evaded arrest by operating from safe havens abroad. The NCB and other central agencies continue to strengthen international partnerships to dismantle organised narcocrime networks.

Man in Odisha carries sister's skeleton...

Odisha minister Suresh Pujari said there was a "lack of humanitarian approach" and the government would ensure strict action against the officials concerned, while the opposition took potshots at the BJP dispensation, pointing out that Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi represents Keonjhar in the state Assembly.

BJD Rajya Sabha MP Manas Ranjan Mangaraj wrote to Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, seeking her urgent intervention in simplifying banking procedures and ensuring the dignity for the poor trying to access their kin's savings.

Nation Focus



FUEL PRICES TO GET EXPENSIVE AFTER APRIL 29: RAHUL GANDHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday warned that the prices of petrol and diesel will be increased after the Assembly elections conclude on April 29. He also attacked the government for allegedly profiteering from low global crude oil prices and said it will now put a burden on the public as the prices are rising. "Election relief over, inflation's heat is on its way! After April 29th, watch out - petrol, diesel, everything will get expensive. "When (crude) oil was cheap, the Modi Government pocketed the profits. Now that it's expensive, it'll dump the burden on you," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi on X.



INDIA AND ARMENIA HOLDS MILITARY DISCUSSIONS

CDS Gen Anil Chauhan held talks with Chief of the General Staff of Armenia, Lt General Edvard Asryan, in Delhi, and the two sides explored avenues for joint ventures in the development of military hardware, officials said on Tuesday. They reaffirmed their shared commitment to a robust and future-oriented strategic partnership. The top military officer of Armenia met Gen Chauhan during his official visit to India. The meeting took place at the Manekshaw Centre in Delhi Cantonment. "General Anil Chauhan #CDS held discussions with Lt General Edvard Asryan, Chief of the General Staff of Armenia, during his official visit to India. The General officer was received by the #CDS and was accorded a Guard of Honour," the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff (HQ IDS) said in a post on X.

No proposal to hike petrol, diesel prices: Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Government on Tuesday ruled out a hike in petrol prices, amidst speculations that an increase was imminent after the Bengal polls on Wednesday. The assertion also came at a time when international oil prices touched 110 dollars a barrel due to the ongoing West Asia conflict.

"There is no proposal to increase petrol and diesel prices," Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said at a news briefing on the fallout of developments in West Asia. She was responding to a question on whether retail fuel prices would be raised after polling in West Bengal concludes on Wednesday. "LPG, petrole-

um and diesel are available in sufficient amounts, and the prices have not increased, so please do not panic," Sharma said, underscoring that supplies remain adequate.

She dismissed speculation of an imminent price rise that had triggered panic buying in parts of States such as Andhra Pradesh. "We have seen panic buying in some places. We are in continuous contact with State Governments in all these places. All retail outlets are being monitored, and supplies are being prioritised (at petrol pumps witnessing increased buying) so that stock availability is ensured and there are no dry-outs," she said.

Last week, Sharma had stated that State-owned fuel retailers were incurring losses of about ₹20 per litre



on petrol and roughly Rs 100 per litre on diesel as pump prices remained frozen for nearly four years despite a surge in global oil prices. Yet there is no plan to increase prices, she had said. Crude, which was \$70 per barrel

last year, averaged over \$114 this month.

In India, retail petrol and diesel prices have remained unchanged for a record fourth year, even as conflict in West Asia has pushed crude oil costs up more than

50 per cent over the past two months. The widening gap between input costs and pump prices has left State-run fuel retailers incurring heavy losses — with some estimates pegging daily loss at about ₹2,400 crore — fuelling speculation of an imminent price hike after politically charged assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Assam, Kerala, and Puducherry conclude on Wednesday.

In Andhra Pradesh, rumours of imminent price rise led to panic buying in several towns, leading to shortage and more than 400 petrol pumps running dry on Sunday, according to reports. According to the Petroleum Ministry, some outlets saw demand rise by as much as 30-33 per cent.

She added that the country has adequate inventories of

all fuels — from petrol and diesel to cooking gas, LPG, and aviation turbine fuel — to meet demand. "We have enough supplies of LPG, petrol and diesel. Prices are stable, and there has been no increase in rates," she said. "I want to urge everyone to believe in rumours. Avoid panic buying and rely on official sources for information."

The clarification comes despite mounting financial pressure on State-run fuel retailers, which officials say are selling petrol and diesel below market rates and incurring significant losses.

Analysts had earlier flagged the possibility of price increases of ₹25-28 per litre after elections due to rising global crude oil costs and widening gaps between international and domestic fuel prices.

No double standards in tackling terrorism, says Rajnath Singh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Tuesday cautioned that there should be no double standards in tackling "State-sponsored" cross-border terrorism and said India demonstrated its "firm resolve" during Operation Sindoor that "terror epicentres are no longer immune to justifiable punishment."

His remarks were in an apparent reference to Pakistan backing various terror groups from its soil. Asserting these points at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' meet in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, Rajnath Singh also pitched for concerted global efforts to combat terrorism.

Incidentally, Pakistan is also part of the SCO grouping. Belarus, China, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan are the other members. The SCO is a permanent inter-governmental international organisation focusing on regional security, politics, and economic cooperation.

Rajnath Singh underlined the need to forge a unified front to tackle the "evils" of terrorism, separatism and extremism by eliminating safe havens and rejecting any



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during the SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting in Kyrgyzstan

political exceptions. He asserted that the sight of State-sponsored cross-border terrorism, which attacks the sovereignty of a nation, must not be lost, as there is no place for double standards.

The defence minister emphasised that the SCO should not hesitate in seeking appropriate action against those who abet, shelter and provide safe havens to terrorists.

"By tackling terrorism, separatism, and extremism without exception, we transform regional security from a challenge into a cornerstone for peace and prosperity," he said.

PM Modi launches 30 projects worth ₹4,018 crore in Sikkim

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Gangtok

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday launched 30 development projects worth around ₹4,018 crore in Sikkim, while attending the closing ceremony of 50 years of Statehood celebrations.

The projects span a wide range of sectors such as infrastructure, connectivity, healthcare, education, power, urban development, environment, tourism and agriculture.

These projects are aimed at accelerating holistic and inclusive development in Sikkim, officials said.

Among major projects, Modi laid the foundation stone for a 100-bed Ayurveda hospital at Yangang in Namchi district and inaugurated a 30-bed Integrated



PM Narendra Modi during the inauguration and foundation stone laying ceremony of the Sikkim's 50 years of Statehood celebrations in Gangtok. State Governor Om Prakash Mathur and State CM Prem Singh Tamang also present

Sowa Rigpa Hospital at NIT Deorali, which will strengthen access to traditional and integrative systems of medicine in the Himalayan State.

The Prime Minister also inaugurated the permanent campus of Sikkim University at Yangang, the administrative block of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose University of Excellence at Chakung, the

Helen Lepcha Medical College at Socheygang in Gangtok, and the Dentam Professional College in Gyalshing district.

He also unveiled a model residential school at Hee Gyathang, a college at Mangshila in Mangan district, and a monastic hostel-classroom at Boomtar Gumpa in Namchi.

Pradhan reviews NCERT book supply, orders timely delivery



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Tuesday reviewed the availability, printing and distribution of textbooks published by NCERT for the ongoing academic session and directed officials to monitor last-mile delivery, especially in rural areas.

Secretary, Department of School Education and Literacy, Sanjay Kumar, along with senior officials from the Ministry of Education and NCERT, were present during the meeting.

In a statement, the ministry said Pradhan reviewed the preparation of upcoming National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks and assessed stock positions across States and Union territories, while examining coordination with State authorities and distribution agencies to ensure timely delivery, particularly in rural areas.

Emphasising that no student should face inconvenience due to delays, the minister directed officials to strengthen supply chains, augment printing capacity where necessary, and closely monitor last-mile delivery.

He also highlighted the availability of digital textbooks through the e-Pathshala platform as an interim measure to support uninterrupted learning until physical copies reach all students, the statement added.

MP HC defers 27% OBC quota, case hearing to May 13

GIRISH SHARMA ■ Bhopal

The Madhya Pradesh High Court on Tuesday deferred the much-awaited final hearing in the 27 per cent OBC reservation case, scheduling fresh dates for May 13, 14 and 15. The development comes as a setback for parties anticipating an early resolution to the long-pending issue.

The hearing was postponed due to the unavailability of records transferred from the Supreme Court. During proceedings, the division bench directed the State Government to ensure that all relevant documents from the apex court are placed on



record before the next hearing. The court made it clear that arguments in the matter will commence only after the necessary records are formally uploaded and verified.

The case had earlier been listed for continuous hearing from April 27 to April 29.

However, proceedings could not continue as planned, with technical and procedural gaps emerging on the second day, leading to the adjournment.

On April 28, the court formally rescheduled the hearing and fixed three consecutive dates in

May to take up the matter in detail.

The delay is primarily linked to four petitions that were earlier transferred to the Supreme Court but were not listed for hearing there. Subsequently, the apex court, through its orders dated February 19 and March 20, 2026, returned all such petitions to the Madhya Pradesh High Court.

The Supreme Court had observed that the transfer of cases was not procedurally justified and advised that the High Court constitute a special bench to dispose of the matter within a stipulated time frame of three months.

Mira road horror: Man attacks guards for failing to recite Kalma

PRAMOD KUMAR SINGH
New Delhi/Mumbai

In a chilling incident that has raised fresh concerns over radicalisation and targeted violence, the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS) has taken over the probe into the stabbing of two security guards in Thane's Mira Road area. The accused, Zaib Zubair Ansari (31), allegedly asked the victims their religion, demanded they recite the Islamic Kalma and attacked them with a knife when they could not comply. Officials described the episode as a prima facie 'Lone wolf' attack carried out by a highly indoctrinated individual.

The swift and brutal nature of the assault, coupled with the religious connotations, prompted the Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis to hand over the case to the ATS. The assault occurred early Monday morning at an under-construction building in the Mira Road locality of Thane district. According to the ATS, Ansari first approached security guards Subrato Sen and his supervisor Raj Kumar Mishra, inquiring about the address of a nearby mosque. When the guards said they did not know the location, Ansari asked whether they were Hindus and walked away. Moments later, he



A sealing notice outside the residence of Zaib Zubair Ansari, accused arrested for allegedly attacking two security guards in Maharashtra's Thane district after asking their religion, in Naya Nagar area, Mumbai on Tuesday

returned, pulled out a knife from his pocket and stabbed both men, leaving them seriously injured.

One of the victims later told investigators that Ansari explicitly asked both guards to recite the Kalma. When they failed to do so, the attack followed. Both guards were rushed to the hospital and remain in critical condition. For the families of the victims, the attack has brought sudden trauma.

Subrato Sen and Rajkumar Mishra were ordinary working men performing routine security duties at an under-construction site. Their inability to recite the Kalma became the trigger for violence, underscoring how religious identity can be

weaponised in moments of confrontation.

According to Mumbai Police officials, Ansari, who returned to India from the United States in 2020, lived alone in a flat at the Smita Regency building in Naya Nagar, Mira Road barely 200 metres from the crime scene. During a search of his residence, ATS teams recovered a handwritten note explicitly referring to "lone wolf" attacks and the Islamic State (IS).

A laptop was found placed on a table, along with three copies of the Quran. The recovery of the note has become central to the investigation. Security officials are examining whether it indicates ideological inspiration from the Islamic State or

merely reflects personal radicalisation. The term "lone wolf" typically denotes an attacker who acts independently, without direct orders or logistical support from a larger terrorist organisation, making such cases particularly difficult to pre-empt through conventional intelligence networks.

Sources say Ansari's background is under intense scrutiny. Having lived abroad until 2020, investigators are probing possible exposure to extremist content during his time in the US or after his return. His solitary lifestyle and the proximity of his residence to the attack site suggest the assault was premeditated.

The incident has triggered an alarm in a region already

sensitive to communal tensions. Mira Road, a densely populated suburb with a mixed Hindu-Muslim demographic, has witnessed occasional friction in the past. Security agencies are now reviewing CCTV footage from the area and scanning Ansari's digital footprint, phone records, social media activity and travel history for any red flags that might have been missed earlier.

The State Home Minister has assured the public that the investigation will be thorough and transparent. "We will not allow any attempt to disturb communal harmony," he said in a brief statement. Meanwhile, additional security has been deployed in sensitive pockets of Thane and Mumbai as a precautionary measure.

The case serves as a stark reminder that terrorism in India is evolving. From coordinated strikes by organised groups to isolated acts by radicalised individuals, the threat matrix is shifting. For now, the focus remains on Zaib Zubair Ansari's motivations, the exact content of the recovered note and whether his actions were entirely self-inspired or subtly influenced by external ideology. The ATS is expected to file a detailed report in the coming days as forensic analysis of the laptop and the note continues.

CTUs, SKM slams worker repression; call for action

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Platform of Central Trade Unions (CTUs) and the Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) on Tuesday issued a scathing joint statement strongly condemning the "brute repression" of workers agitating for wage revisions, an eight-hour workday, and legal entitlements.

The organisations highlighted a surge in spontaneous worker protests across industrial hubs like Baruaani, Panipat, Surat, Manesar, and Noida. They alleged that while workers are demanding basic rights — including double overtime allowance, workplace safety, and social security — the Government has responded with lathi charges, mass arrests, and "illegal house arrests" of activists.

The joint body rejected the "false narrative" spread by authorities in Uttar Pradesh and the Centre, which attributed the unrest to "Urban Naxals" or foreign conspiracies. "The Government must own up to its criminal neglect of workers' genuine demands," the statement read. It further noted that minimum wages in several



States have not been revised for over a decade despite soaring inflation. Key demands raised include the unconditional release of arrested workers, the withdrawal of the "draconian" four labour codes, and the urgent convening of the Indian Labour Conference, which has been pending since 2015.

Turning to agrarian issues, the SKM accused the Centre of betraying farmers regarding MSP (C2+50%) and guaranteed procurement. They expressed grave concern over potential trade deals with the US and EU, describing them as detrimental to national sovereignty and the MSME sector. The SKM has appealed to farmers to join May Day processions on May 1 to mark worker-peasant unity. A high-level joint meeting of CTUs and SKM leaders is scheduled for May 13 in New Delhi to formalise a future plan of action against the "corporate-driven policies" of the regime.

States Focus



BENGAL GOVERNOR URGES HIGH TURNOUT FOR FINAL POLL PHASE

West Bengal Governor RN Ravi on Tuesday appealed to the people of the State to participate enthusiastically in the second and final phase of the Assembly elections on April 29, urging voters, especially the youth, women and first-time electors, to turn out in large numbers and strengthen democracy. "As the next and final phase of the West Bengal Assembly elections takes place tomorrow, I call upon all voters to participate enthusiastically in this festival of democracy," Ravi said in a statement shared by the Lok Bhavan, Kolkata. He particularly urged the youth, women and first-time voters to come out in record numbers and cast their votes.



JITENDRA SINGH LAYS STONE OF NEW BUILDING OF IIA BENGALURU

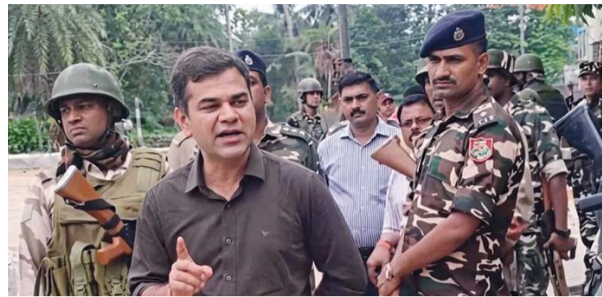
Union Minister Jitendra Singh laid the foundation stone of a new ₹75 crore building at the Indian Institute of Astrophysics (IIA), Bengaluru, which would be developed to strengthen India's capabilities in advanced astronomy research and space science instrumentation. The upcoming facility will be seven-storied with more than nearly one lakh square feet of built-up area. "The new facility will support the growing requirements of students, researchers and national missions, and strengthen India's position in cutting-edge observational science," said Singh. The minister added that the facility brings with it both an opportunity and a responsibility to deliver outcomes that match the scale of investment being made.

TMC slams ECI observer Ajay Pal Sharma over intimidation

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Kolkata

Uttar Pradesh-cadre IPS officer Ajay Pal Sharma, warning potential troublemakers of "appropriate treatment" if they try to disrupt Wednesday's polling in West Bengal, created a fresh political dust-up with the TMC accusing the ECI-appointed police observer of overstepping his role and "intimidating" party workers.

With over a hundred armed central paramilitary troops, an armoured vehicle, and a list of potential "troublemakers" in his pocket, the 2011-batch IPS combed the South 24 Parganas district's



Ajay Pal Sharma is currently deployed as a police observer in West Bengal for election duty

Falta Assembly seat under TMC leader Abhishek Banerjee's backyard of Diamond Harbour parliamentary constituency for two days on a trot. The Prayagraj ACP, who

earned the moniker 'Singham' for his crackdown on criminals, faced protests by Trinamool Congress supporters who raised 'Jai Bangla' in front of the residence as well as the election

office of local TMC candidate Jahangir Khan, officials said.

Reacting to the development, TMC candidate Khan alluded to the Telugu-language action film 'Pushpa' and the Bollywood cop movie 'Singham' to say he would not allow "BJP-appointed police officials to threaten voters".

"This is Bengal; if he is 'Singham', I am 'Pushpa'. No amount of threat or coercion by the BJP-appointed police officials from Uttar Pradesh will be allowed in Falta," he said on Tuesday.

"They came with forces and tried to pressure my people and me. Such actions are not acceptable in a democratic system."

BJP slams Congress over Bengaluru event for Umar Khalid

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The BJP on Tuesday accused the Congress-led Karnataka Government of "openly supporting and eulogising an anti-national" Umar Khalid by allowing an event in Bengaluru linked to him, despite objections being raised by citizens.

The BJP referred to the legal proceedings against Khalid, stating that he has not been granted relief by courts in cases related to the Delhi riots and is facing charges under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA).

A day earlier, the Karnataka BJP had petitioned Bengaluru Police Commissioner Seemant Kumar Singh to cancel Tuesday's event linked to Khalid, stating that he is facing serious charges and that glorifying such an individual would amount to encouraging criminal ele-



ments. According to sources, the editors of the book "Umar Khalid and His World" are expected to read excerpts from it, followed by a discussion in which some "historians and intellectuals" are likely to participate.

In a social media post, BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla claimed that despite objections filed against the event, local police and authorities have

allowed it to go ahead. "Congress Karnataka Government is openly shielding anti-nationals. Allowing a grand programme in Bengaluru to glorify jailed Umar Khalid — the same man whom the Supreme Court has repeatedly denied bail, calling his role central to the conspiracy and a principal architect of the 2020 Delhi riots under UAPA," he said.

"The party has repeatedly supported Umar Khalid, Afzal Guru, Yakub Memon and Sharjeel Imam, and now once again it is patronising and eulogising him by allowing a programme to discuss his views and worldview in Bengaluru," Poonawalla added in a video post.

"They glorify Osama as 'Osama ji', refer to Hafiz Saeed as 'Sahab', call Naxals martyrs, and organise programmes for Umar Khalid. But they call Modi a terrorist. "We have also seen in Kerala how Left groups wanted to give a platform to Hamas. This reflects the kind of anti-national elements supported by the 'INDI' alliance and Congress," he said, dubbing the party as "ANC — anti-national Congress."

Khalid is currently in jail in connection with allegations of conspiracy behind the 2020 Delhi riots.

Rahul Gandhi meets tribal leaders in Great Nicobar



LoP in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi being welcomed during his visit to INS Baaz Gate in Campbell Bay, Andaman and Nicobar Islands

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Sri Vijaya Puram

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who is on a visit to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, on Tuesday met tribal leaders who are raising concerns over the mega infrastructure project in the Great Nicobar region.

A section of tribal communities in Campbell Bay in the Nicobar district has been alleging a lack of transparency, environmental risks, and neglect of tribal rights in the project.

The project includes building a transshipment port, an integrated township, a dual-use civil and military airport, and a power plant.

On April 26, Rahul Gandhi arrived at Sri Vijaya Puram in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and had a meeting with the party leaders.

He, along with local Congress leaders, went to Campbell Bay on Tuesday to understand the concerns of the tribal people related to the Great Nicobar projects. Gandhi criticised the alleged corporate influence in the archipelago and stressed that development

should prioritise local needs rather than corporate interests. During his visit, he interacted with members of the Nicobarese tribal community and others in Campbell Bay.

The Congress leader also visited Indira Point, the southernmost tip of India, and paid floral tribute to former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, after which the spot was named.

Tribal communities alleged that they are facing considerable hardship due to the proposed Great Nicobar projects and demanded that the Central Government take their concerns into account.

Titus Peter, First Captain (village head) of Pulobhabhi village, said that people of Campbell Bay expressed apprehension about the impact on the Shompen tribe, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), claiming that increased outside contact could expose them to diseases and threaten their survival.

Peter also warned of ecological damage, saying the Great Nicobar project could adversely affect endemic species unique to the island.

Drive to check Marathi skills of auto, taxi drivers from May 1

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Mumbai

The Maharashtra transport department will launch a special verification drive from May 1 to August 15 to ensure effective implementation of the decision to make Marathi mandatory for auto-rickshaw and taxi drivers in the State, minister Pratap Sarnaik said on Tuesday.

Addressing a press conference, the transport minister said that under the drive, licences of the drivers will not be cancelled solely for not knowing Marathi, but strict action will be taken against the violators and those engaged in illegal transportation.

"Action will be taken only as per existing legal provisions," he said.

The drive will be carried out across all 59 Regional Transport Offices (RTOs) in the State under the supervision of a committee headed by Additional Transport Commissioner Ravindra Gaikwad.



"If one wants to do business in Maharashtra, knowing Marathi is essential," the minister said, adding that representatives of auto and taxi unions have expressed full support to the decision. Citing a recent special drive in Mira-Bhayander, Sarnaik said an inspection of 3,443 auto-rickshaws was conducted, during which 565 drivers failed to demonstrate the knowledge of Marathi.

"But these drivers have shown willingness to learn the language," he said.

The committee, headed by Gaikwad, will monitor the campaign on a daily and weekly basis and issue directions to RTOs based on inspection reports, he added.

Facilities will be provided at RTO offices for drivers willing to learn Marathi, with training support from Konkani Marathi Sahitya Parishad and Mumbai Marathi Sahitya Sangh. Booklets and e-materials will also be made available, according to Sarnaik.

Drivers who complete the training will be issued certificates by the State Government, which will be required at the time of licence renewal, the minister said.

"Giving an opportunity to those willing to learn Marathi is part of the State's tradition, but there will be no compromise with those violating rules," Sarnaik warned.

Border movement restricted for West Bengal elections

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Kolkata

The movement of people and vehicles on the Bangladesh border routes in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district has been restricted ahead of the second and final phase of the Assembly elections in the State on Wednesday, officials said.

The curb, which has been imposed on April 26 and will continue till the completion of the polling process, is applicable to the Petrapole land port, the largest such facility in South Asia, they said.

"...this order restraining the movement of both people and vehicles for exit



BSF personnel conduct a route march in Nadia

to Bangladesh and entry to Indian territory from Bangladesh in any constituency under the North 24 Parganas district with effect from 6 pm on April 26 till completion of the polling process," the district magistrate said.

The order, however, allowed exemptions in case of medical emergencies, voters returning to exercise their franchise, and transport of perishable goods.

Thirty-three Assembly constituencies in the district will go to the polls on April

29. The curb is aimed at preventing any cross-border movement that could influence the electoral process, particularly in border districts like North 24 Parganas, which share a porous boundary with Bangladesh, a Petrapole Land Port official said. West Bengal shares a 2,200-km-long international border with Bangladesh, making it a crucial corridor for trade.

The Petrapole land port handles a substantial share of India-Bangladesh trade and typically sees around 700-1,000 trucks crossing daily, carrying goods such as garments, cotton yarn, food items, plastics, and engineering products.

Controversy surrounding book on Shivaji unwarranted: Fadnavis

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Solapur

Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis on Tuesday termed as "unwarranted" the controversy over a book on Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, in which Shiv Sena MLA Sanjay Gaikwad allegedly made objectionable remarks against its publisher.

An audio clip surfaced last week on social media, in which Gaikwad was heard using offensive language and threatening Kolhapur-based publisher Prashant Ambi. The MLA referred to the book titled 'Shivaji Kon Hota' (Who was Shivaji), written by CPI leader Govind Pansare and originally published in 1988.

Talking to reporters in Solapur, CM Fadnavis, "The book was published in the 1980s. Have those who have raked up a controversy read the book? The stature of the warrior king is so big that no one can insult him. Whatever is happening is anti-social and insensitive."

The controversy over the book is unwarranted, he said, and cautioned against attempts to sensationalise issues merely to remain in the news. When asked about the BJP's candidates for the upcoming legislative council polls, Fadnavis said appointments and candidate selec-



tions are decided by the party's parliamentary board, and not by him individually. "All decisions will be taken as per the party process," he said, adding that discussions are ongoing and outcomes will be known after due deliberations. Nine council members, including former chief minister Uddhav Thackeray, are retiring on May 13. As per the schedule announced by the Election Commission of India, polling will be held on May 12. The counting of votes will take place on the same day at 5 pm, and the entire process is expected to be completed by May 13. The BJP has decided to contest four of the nine seats in the biennial elections.

On the sugar sector, he said the State has consistently achieved over 99 per cent of the Fair and Remunerative Price (FRP) payments to farmers, though there may be minor fluctuations due to market conditions affecting sugar mills.

Peace precondition for development in Manipur: CM

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Imphal

Manipur Chief Minister Y Khemchand Singh on Tuesday said that peace is a precondition for development in the State, which has been affected by ethnic violence, and the Government is making all possible efforts to restore normalcy through dialogue.

Singh made the remarks while attending an event at Chanam Sandrok in Imphal East district.

"The Government has been trying to restore free



movement along the highways for all communities of the State and restore peace through talks," the chief minister said.

The warring Meitei and Kuki communities had blocked major highways to prevent the opposing community from using them.

Tharoor junks Rijiju's claim that he agreed Congress is anti-women

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on Tuesday debunked Union minister Kiren Rijiju's reported claim that the opposition party leader had agreed that the Congress is "anti-women", asserting that at no point did he imply any such thing and that his party has stood for women's rights and reservation.

Reacting to Rijiju's claims, Tharoor stressed that the Congress is totally in favour of women's reservation and prepared to have it implemented right now — without linking it to delimitation.



In a post on X, the Congress leader said, "I am sorry, but with the greatest respect for Kiren Rijiju, at no point did I say or imply any

such thing — and I have seven witnesses in the photograph who can confirm that!"

"That was what he meant,

our Minister says. No, sir, that is NOT what I meant. "That Congress can be anti-women...he agreed in a way," he added. "I am sorry, but I did NOT agree in any way," Tharoor said.

"The Congress has stood for women's rights and women's reservation under a strong woman president in Sonia Gandhi, initiated the Women's Reservation Bill, passed it in the Rajya Sabha during our tenure and supported it in the Lok Sabha when it was brought by the Government of India in 2023," he said.

"We are totally in favour of women's reservation and

are prepared to have it implemented right now — without linking it to delimitation," the Thiruvananthapuram MP added.

Rijiju's reported comments came while narrating details of the conversation he had with Tharoor on April 18, after the end of the three-day special sitting of Parliament during which the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures in 2029 and increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 was defeated in the Lok Sabha.

TVK chief Vijay prays at Tiruchendur temple ahead of results



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Tuticorin (Tamil Nadu)

Days after the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections, TVK chief Vijay visited the renowned Subramanya Swamy temple on Tuesday.

A source in Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) said Vijay prayed for the victory of his party in the Assembly election held on April 23 in the State. The counting of votes will take place on May 4, and the party is fancying its chances of a good show in its maiden electoral battle.

Also known as Tiruchendur Murugan temple, the shrine here is the second among the six sacred abodes (Arupadai Veedu) of Lord Subrahmanya in Tamil Nadu. It is located in the Ramanathapuram district.



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Order Order

Delhi HC grants interim bail to Engineer Rashid

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday granted one-week interim bail to jailed Lok Sabha member from Jammu and Kashmir, Sheikh Abdul Rashid alias Engineer Rashid, to enable him to visit his ailing father.

A bench of justices Prathiba M Singh and Madhu Jain, however, clarified that during this period, Rashid, who is undergoing jail term in a terror funding case, could either visit the hospital where his father is being treated or remain at home.

The bench further ordered that two police officials would accompany him in plainclothes at all times and Rashid shall not bear the cost of their travel.

During the one-week period, there shall not be any "undue visitors" except immediate family members, it added. The court passed the order while dealing with Rashid's appeal against a trial court's April 24 decision refusing to grant him interim bail.



SC plans to ask AIIMS to constitute panel over declaring patient braindead

The Supreme Court on Tuesday indicated that it would ask the All India Institute of Medical Sciences to constitute a committee to examine the suggestions given by a petitioner relating to the procedure of declaring a patient brain dead.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta was hearing a plea challenging a June 2017 order of the Kerala High Court.

The petitioner had moved the High Court, highlighting the alleged malpractice in declaring a patient to be brain dead. During the hearing on Tuesday, the petitioner, who appeared in person, referred to the process of certifying a patient to be brain dead.

"There must be verifiable evidence of a patient being brain dead," the petitioner told the apex court. Contending that brain death is a condition when there is no supply of blood to the brain, the petitioner suggested that angiography and an EEG of the brain should be conducted.

The electroencephalogram (EEG) test measures electrical activity in the brain. The bench told the petitioner to give his suggestions in writing.



UP courts awards death sentence to woman, sons

A fast-track court in Muzaffarnagar on Tuesday sentenced a woman and her three sons to death in a murder case dating back to September 2019.

The verdict was pronounced by Additional District Judge (Fast Track Court), Muzaffarnagar Ravi Kumar Diwaker, who ordered that the accused Mukesh (60), her three sons Pradeep (38), Sandeep (36) and Sonu (30) be hanged till death.

The judge declared that he was imposing the death sentence because it was the rarest of the rare cases. However, the verdict would be subject to confirmation by the Allahabad High Court, Government lawyer Kuldeep Kumar told PTI.

The court has also imposed a fine of ₹50,000 on each of the accused after holding them guilty under Section 302 of the IPC. The court has directed that the entire amount of the fine imposed on the accused be given to the complainant, Rajbala, the mother of the deceased.



Roads cannot be blocked for religious activities: SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Commenting that roads cannot be blocked in the name of religious activities, the Supreme Court on Tuesday said a denomination has the autonomy in the manner of worship and the court cannot sit in judgment over its religious affairs, but if a secular activity is being affected, the Government can interfere with its rights.

The observation of a nine-judge Constitution bench came while hearing petitions related to discrimination against women at religious places, including the Sabarimala temple in Kerala, and on the ambit and scope of the religious freedom prac-

tised by multiple faiths. The bench comprised Chief Justice of India (CJI) Surya Kant and Justices BV Nagarathna, MM Sundresh, Ahsanuddin Amanullah, Aravind Kumar, Augustine George Masih, Prasanna B Varale, R Mahadevan and Joymalya Bagchi.

On the ninth day of the hearing, advocate Akshay Nagarajan, representing the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha in the court, submitted that the Government cannot interfere with a religious denomination's rights by citing grounds under Article 25(2)(a).

Article 25(2)(a) of the Constitution empowers the State to regulate or restrict any economic, financial, political or other secular activity



associated with religious practices.

Nagarajan said the protection under Article 25 is not confined merely to matters of religious belief and extends equally to outward manifestations of faith, including rituals, observances, cere-

monies and practices associated with the worship of a particular deity.

The submissions led Justice Nagarathna to observe that the State can step in if a secular activity is affected by religious activities.

"Suppose there is a temple,

they want to have an annual festival, like you have the annual cart or chariot festival. You cannot block all the roads around the temple. That has nothing to do with religion. You do your religious activity, but not by blocking the roads. The State can always step in to regulate," she said.

Justice Nagarathna asserted that while the court cannot sit in judgment over the religious affairs of a denomination as autonomy has been given to the denomination under the Constitution, when secular activities are affected, the State can always interfere.

"Suppose they say they have a particular way of worship. That is the autonomy which is given in the manner of worship. Court

cannot sit in judgment and say, no this cannot be done. But if a secular activity is also affected, then the State can step in to regulate," the judge said.

Nagarajan contended that secular rights can be taken care of under Article 26(d). Article 26(d) of the Constitution guarantees religious denominations the right to administer their own movable and immovable properties in accordance with law. During the hearing, advocate Ashwini Upadhyay submitted that "Bharat" was divided into 25 pieces in the last 2,000 years due to denominational conflicts and in the last 200 years, it was divided into seven countries.

Pleas seeking ownership rights of Bhojshala not maintainable: Intervenor to High Court

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Indore

An intervenor in the Bhojshala-Kamal Maula Masjid dispute has argued before the Madhya Pradesh High Court that two PILs filed by Hindu parties effectively seek ownership of the protected 11th-century monument and are not maintainable under writ jurisdiction.

The Hindu side considers Bhojshala, located in Dhar district, a temple of Vagdevi (Goddess Saraswati), while the Muslim community claims it as Kamal Maula Masjid.

Senior advocate Shobha Menon, appearing for intervenor Munir Ahmad and others from the Muslim community, on Monday raised objections to the maintainability of the petitions before an Indore bench of justices Vijay Kumar Shukla and Alok Awasthi.

She submitted that disputes over property ownership fall within the domain of civil courts and cannot be adjudicated directly by the



High Court under Article 226 of the Constitution (dealing with HC's power to issue certain writs).

Menon said the two petitions — filed by the organisation 'Hindu Front for Justice, and by one Kuldeep Tiwari and another petitioner — were similar in nature.

"The core prayer in both petitions is that only Hindus should be allowed to worship at the disputed monument, which effectively amounts to seeking ownership rights (of the site)," she claimed.

Menon argued that the petitioners were seeking the determination of their rights and formation of a trust, which indicates a claim over

ownership and, therefore, cannot be pursued as public interest litigation (PIL).

The senior counsel questioned the locus standi of the petitioners, arguing that merely claiming to be a social activist does not entitle a person to file a PIL.

She contended that courts have consistently required proof of bona fide work for disadvantaged sections in PIL matters. The intervenor further claimed that the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), which protects the monument, and the Government have taken differing stands over the years regarding the nature of the structure.

CCTVs in police station: SC asks amicus to convene meeting on utilisation of funds

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

The Supreme Court on Tuesday said that a meeting be convened on May 6 to deliberate on the aspect of utilisation of funds by the states on installation of CCTVs in police stations across the country.

A bench of Justices Vikram Nath and Sandeep Mehta asked senior advocate Siddhartha Dave, who is assisting it as an amicus curiae in a suo motu matter concerning lack of functional CCTVs in police stations, to hold a meeting on May 6 with the Centre, all States and Union Territories.

"We are of the view that a meeting be convened by the amicus, as done earlier, in which the home secretary of the central Government or his nominee not below the rank of joint or additional secretary and the home secretary of States/Union Territories will participate," the bench said.



The issue cropped up after the amicus flagged the aspect of utilisation of funds by the states.

Dave told the bench that in UTs, the Centre gives 100 percent funds while in hilly States, the central Government gives 90 percent funding.

He said in remaining states, the Centre gives 60 percent while the rest 40 percent funding is by the respective state.

"Why don't we get responses of the states only on utilisation of funds?" the bench said.

The top court suggested that the amicus can convene a meeting with the Centre, States and UTs on the issue.

Delhi HC judge recuses self from hearing Karti Chidambaram's plea

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

Delhi High Court judge Justice Swarnan Kanta Sharma on Tuesday recused herself from hearing a plea of Congress MP Karti Chidambaram seeking to quash a CBI FIR against him for allegedly helping an alcoholic beverage company over the ban on the duty-free sale of its whisky.

"List before another bench," the judge said.

Seeking to quash the case, Karti has alleged in the High Court that there was a "gross delay" in registration of the "illegal" FIR on January 1, 2025, which was malafide, borne out of "political vendetta and regime revenge".

The matter would be listed next on July 21.

The case, fourth against the Congress MP, stems from a preliminary inquiry registered by the CBI in 2018 to investigate alleged irregularities in granting FIPB clearance when his father, P Chidambaram, was the finance minister.

WB polls: Plea filed in HC claiming ECI violation of court orders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

A petition was filed in the Calcutta High Court on Tuesday, claiming that its earlier order on action against "troublemakers" in view of the West Bengal assembly polls was not being adhered to by the Election Commission.

The High Court had on April 22 stayed an order of the commission's police observer, who termed certain citizens as "troublemakers" and directed the authorities concerned to take action against them.

In a plea before a division bench presided by Chief Justice Sujoy Paul, TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee claimed that the commission prepared a fresh list of around 350 people for action against them. Banerjee, also a senior lawyer, alleged that despite a stay order of the High Court till June 30, the poll panel was not adhering to it. The division bench, also comprising Justice



Partha Sarathi Sen, granted permission to Banerjee's client to file a contempt petition on a verbal prayer by him.

Acting on a PIL claiming that people's fundamental right to liberty would be affected by the EC order, the division bench had held that the police observer "erred in issuing a blanket direction by treating certain citizens as troublemakers". The court had, however, made it clear that the order would not come in the way of the civil/police authorities to proceed against any person, who commits an offence under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Representation of People's Act, 1951 or any other penal law.

HC slams West Bengal Govt for delay in handing over land to BSF for fencing India-Bangladesh border

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ Kolkata

The Calcutta High Court has reprimanded the West Bengal Government for failing to comply with its order to hand over land to the BSF to fence the India-Bangladesh border in the state, noting that only eight-kilometre stretches of the 127 km have been given to the border guarding force so far.

On January 27, a division bench presided by Chief Justice Sujoy Paul had directed the state Government to hand over 127 km of land "already acquired/purchased" for which "compensation" had been "received by the state Government from the Centre", to the BSF by March 31.

Castigating the state for not handing over the entire 127 kms of land to the BSF in nine districts by the end of March, the High Court on April 22 directed the state Government to file a detailed affidavit within two weeks,



informing it of the steps taken to comply with its January order.

It expressed displeasure over the state Government handing over just eight kilometres of land instead of the 127 km as ordered by the court.

"What is surprising and shocking is that in a matter of national importance, the respondent state has not thought it proper to file their report on affidavit," the court observed.

"A sketchy and evasive report has been filed which

does not disclose date and place-wise as to what action has been taken for handing over the land after passing the order of this court on January 27, 2026," it noted.

The court imposed a cost of ₹25,000 on the officer who has filed the report, to be paid from his own pocket, for non-compliance with its earlier order.

"We deprecate the practice of filing such an evasive and sketchy report," the division bench, also comprising Justice Partha Sarathi Sen, said.

The court directed the state Government to file a detailed affidavit, informing it of the day-to-day steps taken district-wise in compliance with its January 27 order.

"The report must disclose the steps taken by each of the districts for handing over the land" to the BSF after the January 27 order, the division bench directed, ordering the state to file a compliance report in the form of an affidavit within two weeks.

It said that if the entire land could not be handed over, the minimum expectation was to show the reasons for not complying with the court order. The report is silent about the same, the High Court observed.

The court made the observation while hearing a PIL filed by Lt General Subrata Saha (ret'd) seeking direction to the West Bengal Government to hand over land to the BSF for fencing in the interest of national security.

WhatsApp banned 9,400 accounts involved in digital arrest scams since January this year: Centre to SC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
■ New Delhi

A multi-pronged action involving telecom regulators, service providers, the RBI, tech giants and the CBI has been taken to tackle the rising menace of digital arrest scams, besides WhatsApp banning 9,400 accounts involved in such offences, the Centre has told the Supreme Court.

The action was detailed by the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre (I4C) of the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) which has filed a comprehensive status report in pursuance of the Supreme Court's directions of February 9 to curb rising cases of digital arrests in the country, according to sources.

A bench headed by Chief Justice Surya Kant, which had taken suo motu cognisance of online frauds, including digital arrests, had issued a slew of directions including asking the Reserve Bank of

India (RBI), the Department of Telecommunications (DoT), and others to jointly hold a meeting to come up with a framework for providing compensation in digital arrest cases.

The fresh status report, filed through Attorney General R Venkataramani, detailed the enforcement actions taken by tech giant WhatsApp in the last 12 weeks since January this year.

"In direct response to concerns raised by I4C, MEITY (Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology) and DoT, WhatsApp in January 2026 launched a structured, multi-week dedicated investigation specifically focused on digital arrest scams targeting Indian users. This investigation followed a rigorous methodology: identify seed signals map networks enforce against the entire network build scaled automated defences," it said, adding 9,400 accounts have been banned due to alleged involvement in digital



arrests. To further protect users, WhatsApp is deploying several "enforcement innovations", including logo detection where systems to identify and remove accounts using official police or Government insignia in display pictures, the status report said.

WhatsApp is contemplating introducing a new feature to

warn users when they receive a call from a "newly created" or "non-tenured" account, a common trait of scam profiles, the status report said, adding that process to automatically hide profile pictures of suspicious unknown callers to prevent scammers from using visual cues of authority will also be introduced.

The DoT and the Telecom Service Providers (TSPs) have committed to a strict new timeline for neutralising fraudulent SIM cards, including the fact that the committee is working toward a mechanism to block suspicious SIM cards within 2 to 3 hours of identification, it said.

The report said the CBI has set a ₹10 crore loss threshold for taking over digital arrest investigations.

Currently, the CBI has re-registered three major cases, including two cases from Gujarat involving massive financial frauds and a high-profile Delhi case where a single victim was defrauded of ₹22.92 crore, it said.

The report said a high-level Inter-Departmental Committee chaired by senior officials held its third meeting on March 12, bringing together stakeholders, including telecom operators, financial regulators, and digital platforms. One of the key central propos-

als is the rollout of a Biometric Identity Verification System (BIVS) to enable real-time, cross-network monitoring of SIM card issuance, it said. The DoT has been tasked with implementing this system by December 2026, it added.

The report said WhatsApp has committed to several safeguards, including implementation of SIM-binding mechanisms within four to six.

The SIM binding is a security mandate requiring the active, KYC-verified SIM card to be physically present and active in the phone for the app to function. If the SIM is removed, swapped, or inactive, the app will stop working. The RBI, as per the report, has finalised a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) directing banks to place temporary holds on suspicious transactions to curb money mule activities.

Urging the top court to take on record the report, the MHA sought issuance of appropriate direc-

tions to DoT to implement measures identified by Inter-Departmental Committee by requiring due compliance by TSPs and enlisting their cooperation towards expediting notification and implementation of "Telecommunications (User Identification) Rules and the Biometric Identity Verification System (BIVS) for national level visibility of SIM issuance".

It also sought direction to evolve a mechanism for expeditious blocking of suspicious or fraudulent SIM cards used in cybercrime cases, including digital arrest scams.

"MeiTY is advised to secure compliance by WhatsApp, to ensure timely implementation of the safeguards and commitments made before the Inter17 Departmental Committee, including implementation of the SIM binding mechanism in compliance with the DoT circular," it said.



Editor's TAKE

FTA: Towards closer ties with New Zealand

The India-New Zealand FTA is less about immediate trade gains and more about strategic positioning, and reflects India's resolve to increase its global outreach

It is a Trump world where uncertainty reigns. Whether in trade or geopolitics, the US President can always spring a surprise, disrupting national economies and nations themselves. In this scenario, India has moved swiftly to diversify its trade ties and lessen its trade dependence on the United States. It is now exploring and committing itself to bilateral ties that insulate it from the vagaries of geopolitical headwinds. India has already established bilateral ties with the UAE and Australia, and is exploring further possibilities with many other countries. In the chain of these agreements comes the recently concluded India-New Zealand Free Trade Agreement, which again signals a calibrated shift in New Delhi's economic diplomacy. The agreement was signed by Piyush Goyal and Todd McClay, and endorsed by Christopher Luxon as a "once-in-a-generation" deal. The agreement may have a limited impact on India's trade, as Indo-New Zealand trade is not substantial, but it does show a direction and purpose.

The pact undoubtedly gives India new market access and certainty. New Zealand has agreed to give 100 per cent duty-free access to all Indian exports covering over 8,000 tariff lines—creating a rare opportunity for frictionless entry into a developed market. For Indian sectors such as textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals, and auto components, this is an immediate competitive advantage. While New Zealand's market size is modest, the value lies in predictability and the ability to scale niche exports. In today's world, increasingly marked by protectionism, this is a big deal. Equally important is the agreement's role in diversifying India's trade partnerships. The agreement enhances India's Indo-Pacific trade footprint. Though bilateral trade is currently limited, the target of doubling it to \$5 billion within five years is realistic. Beyond goods, the FTA's emphasis on services and mobility reflects the changing nature of global trade. The provision for visas for Indian professionals in the IT, healthcare, and engineering sectors is a notable gain. It aligns with India's strength as a services exporter and addresses long-standing demands for easier movement of skilled labour. For Indian youth and students, expanded post-study work opportunities in New Zealand open new avenues for global exposure and skill acquisition. The investment dimension of the pact is another significant pillar. New Zealand's commitment to invest up to \$20 billion in India over the next 15 years has the potential to catalyse growth in sectors such as technology, manufacturing, and food processing. The fast-track arrangement allowing Indian food processors to import New Zealand inputs duty-free for re-export is particularly strategic. It strengthens India's ambition to position itself as a global food processing hub while integrating it more deeply into international value chains.

Yet, the agreement is not without riders. India's cautious approach in excluding critical sectors such as dairy, sugar, and edible oils underscores the political economy of trade. If effectively implemented, it could serve as a template for future engagements—where ambition is matched by caution, and openness is anchored in national priorities.

Nepal's 'Ghanti' govt rings in change

With sweeping arrests, bold administrative resets, and a charged geopolitical backdrop involving the United States, China, and India, Nepal stands at a crossroads where symbolism, disruption, and uncertainty converge



ASHOK K MEHTA

Lame Ahal in Kaski district of Pokhara was a traditional Nepali Congress-voting village; it did not surprise anyone when it voted en masse for the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP). The sound of bells (ghanti, RSP's election symbol) has enchanted music-loving Nepalis. Last Saturday, more than three weeks after Balen Shah took oath as Prime Minister on March 27, to my question whether Lame Ahal was happy with the Balen government, veteran Yam Bahadur replied: "ekdum! bilkul khushi chha".

Incidentally, Balen has not spoken a word in public: no meeting with the press; no address to the nation or the newly elected Parliament; no posts on X or other social media. His longest election rally speech was five minutes. He presides in silence, and it works for him, as an RSP PhD scholar at South Asia University, Delhi, told me. All he did was release a five-minute video clip, "Jai Mahakali", the Gorkha war cry that went viral, establishing his skills as a renowned rapper. For Balen, style is more important than substance. He has introduced several changes: the diplomatic code of conduct—meeting ambassadors en bloc or in batches, not individually. Former Chinese ambassador Hou Yanqi used to drop in at Sheetal Niwas (the President's residence) or Baluwatar (the Prime Minister's residence) without informing the Foreign Ministry. Balen will follow protocol: meet emissaries at the appropriate level without deviation. The test will be on 1 May, when the US super ambassador and presidential envoy to South and Central Asia, Sergio Gor, has sought a meeting with him, and only him.

Home Minister Sudhan Gurung (and one more minister), who has reportedly resigned (?), performed equally spectacularly: he arrested former Prime Minister KP Oli and Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak on March 28, indicating that corruption and misgovernance were his government's targets. Both have since been released on bail. Investigations were ordered into money laundering allegations against former Prime Ministers SB Deuba, Prachanda, and Oli, while former minister Deepak Khadka and industrialist Shankar Agarwal were arrested. The Deuba family is in Singapore/Hong Kong for medical treatment and has been declared fugitives. A commission will investigate the wealth of individuals, officials, and politicians since 1991. Many hope that the omissions of the Karki Judicial Commission, and the events of 9 September 2025, will also be separately investigated, as they implicate Shah and RSP President Rabi Lamichhane.

Prime Minister Purna, Lamichhane is the leader, elected to Parliament but currently on bail. He is hoping to be cleared of multiple cases in court on allegations of fraud and money laundering.



INDIA HAS NEVER WORKED WITH A NEW POLITICAL ENTITY LIKE THE RSP. BUT NOR HAD IT DEALT WITH THE NATIONAL PEOPLE'S POWER IN SRI LANKA, WITH WHOM ITS RELATIONS ARE NOW AMONG THE BEST IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

The writer, presently in Nepal, is a retired Major General, who served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka

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As a former TV host, he is charismatic, eloquent, and ambitious, with a large following in the party. A clash between Balen and Rabi is likely. The government launched its 100-point reforms—many aspirational, but several already implemented, such as the five-day week, an overhaul of the bureaucracy, and the recall of ambassadors. Shankar Sharma, the cat-with-nine-lives envoy to New Delhi—previously recalled twice and reinstated—will finally say goodbye to diplomacy. The RSP is just five years old and has no experienced civil servants; so it will focus on youth in its selections. Although the focus of the government is internal and domestic, diplomacy has taken centre stage. The first caller in Kathmandu was US Assistant Secretary of State Paul Samir Kapur, who met Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal, Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle, Lamichhane, and Army Chief Gen Ashok Sigdel. He pre-empted any Indian diplomatic visitor, though Foreign Minister S Jaishankar—who was the first to land in Colombo after President Anura Dissanayake's landslide victory in 2024—is not a frequent visitor to Kathmandu. He met Khanal during the Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius this month.

Kapur was on a dual mission: to accelerate the utilisation of the USD 550 million Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) Nepal Compact; and the US State Partnership Programme (SPP). The MCC was cleared after strenuous debate in Nepal and is set to expire in August 2028. The SPP, which seeks military cooperation, was rejected in 2022. Kapur also urged Nepal to issue ID cards to Tibetan refugees, as around 20,000 Tibetans of various denominations are present across Nepal. Not to be outpaced by the US, Chinese Deputy Director General of Asian Affairs Cao Jing arrived in Kathmandu. The Nepalese are often wary of the bluntness of Chinese officials. She is said to have warned against the MCC and SPP, and against any tinkering with the Tibetan issue, a highly sensitive matter for Beijing. Cao also warned against any Nepalese official visit-

ing the Tibetan government-in-exile in Dharamsala for the inauguration on 28 May of Penpa Tsering, re-elected Sikyong (Prime Minister) for another five years. The China-US geopolitical rivalry now supersedes India's primacy in Nepal's tri-polar contest. Sources in Kathmandu indicate that Balen will visit Delhi either before or after the UNGA in September, but India will be his first foreign visit. Balen or Wagle have not indicated how the primary challenges—jobs and the economy—will be addressed. The economy was growing at 4.5 per cent, and both remittances and foreign exchange reserves were sound. Two million Nepalese work in the Gulf, and another 6 to 8 million in India and elsewhere. The Gulf war over the past two years has hit tourism and remittances, and the economy may slide despite new austerity programmes. Losses due to arson during last year's Gen Z protests were colossal, running into billions of dollars.

Still, the investment climate is likely to improve now that a politically stable single-party government is in power after three decades. India, as the reputed first responder, has yet to show its cards. The RSP was considering closing the open border and attempting the northern route for trade through Tibet, despite most trade being routed through India. Nationalism has its place. Oli signed a slew of agreements to spite India following the economic blockade (2015). Kathmandu should have learnt its lesson about the North, as the Kodari-Kathmandu railway and North-South BRI corridors remain largely aspirational.

Ordinary Nepalis frequently tell me that they will not survive if the India-Nepal border is closed. India has never worked with a new political entity like the RSP. But nor had it dealt with the National People's Power in Sri Lanka, with whom its relations are now among the best in the neighbourhood. The Ghanti is not eternal, as the vanquished can reincarnate. For now, while the US and China shadowbox in Nepal, India can bide its time.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

PIC TALK



A woman performs a ritual on the occasion of 'Mohini Ekadashi' at a temple in Bikaner. PHOTO: PTI

What has God planned for us?



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND OPINION

These are the basic facts. There is one God; there has been one, and there will continue to be one God eternally. The same is true about us souls—there are many of us. We are small, which was necessary for co-existence. Another necessity was to be given free will; otherwise, we would not have individuality. However, this free will has been limited to desire and decision. Souls can only desire whatever they choose, but physical acts are required to be given shape by either God or material nature. The example is of wanting to eat a certain fruit; one has to obtain it. This is provided by material nature. In the case of God, He simply makes it happen like a miracle through His 'ichcha shakti' (divine willpower).

A soul has the freedom to choose either of them. Most people, knowingly or unknowingly, choose material



nature alone, with its limitations. For example, a person desires a house to live in, but material nature will provide it only if he is deserving of owning it. To understand this phenomenon, we must refer to the 'karmaphala principle', which states: "What you sow is what you reap." I am referring to what we deserve based on acts done earlier, mostly in past lives. Present acts mostly contribute to future lives. This may appear quite unjust, because present acts should not take so long as the next life to bear fruit. There is a way out: choose God as the 'karta' (doer) in your life. Perfect! He can perform miracles. Then why do most people not take this option? They do not, for many reasons; the most common

is material consciousness—assuming oneself to be a material body. Due to this identification, the mind takes control, and this faculty given to us to connect with God is constantly trying to satisfy the senses. And the senses are never satisfied; such is their nature. The free will given to us is misunderstood as complete freedom, which it was never intended to be. Wise persons see through all this and take shelter in God in baby steps. The moment one has such an intention, God is interested. Is He not the whole, and we but parts? (The Bhagavad Gita 15.7) God has praised four types of devotees—those who take His shelter. God is also ready to take our responsibility if we remain in His shelter, having begun on this path. He helps to control the mind by providing spiritual intelligence (10.10). God, and only God, has the power to change our fate and, most importantly, our nature, which is the cause of most of our present woes. God does not stop there; He grants supreme peace (18.62), which we all crave but never achieve on our own.

I can go on about God's 'kripa' (grace); He even liberates (18.66) us from the painful cycle of birth and death in material bodies. Thankfully, I have begun this journey, and I am enjoying the experience.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and a popular columnist

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A BREAKTHROUGH IN THE FIGHT AGAINST MALARIA

A new drug has emerged, designed to overcome resistance signals, which is a great achievement in medical science. This was announced by the World Health Organisation, and it can be called a rare and consequential moment in global public health. It is noteworthy that such a finding carries the promise of shifting the battle against one of humanity's oldest and deadliest adversaries.

The announcement of a breakthrough malaria drug by the World Health Organisation marks a rare and consequential moment in global public health—one that carries the promise of shifting the battle against one of humanity's oldest and deadliest adversaries. For decades, malaria has resisted eradication, not for lack of effort, but because of its extraordinary

adaptability. The parasite's ability to evolve resistance to frontline treatments has repeatedly blunted progress, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa and parts of South Asia. The emergence of a new, effective drug—especially one designed to overcome resistance signals—is more than incremental progress; it represents a strategic breakthrough. This is not merely a scientific victory, but a lifeline for health systems grappling with resurging caseloads.

Malaria continues to claim hundreds of thousands of lives annually, with children under five bearing the brunt. If deployed effectively, this breakthrough could sharply reduce severe cases and fatalities.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR

Please send your letter to the info@dailypioneer.com. In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

Heat crisis demands urgent adaptation

India's familiar summer heat has evolved into a far more dangerous and persistent crisis. What was once considered extreme—temperatures crossing 40°C—is now increasingly routine, while even 34-35°C in coastal regions feels oppressive due to rising humidity.

Climate projections warn that a 2°C global temperature rise could triple heat exposure, with South Asia among the worst affected. The situation is aggravated by "marine heatwaves", which reduce the cooling effect of sea breezes, trapping humidity along coastal belts. Inland regions such as Vidarbha face a different but equally severe challenge—dry heat, hot winds, and minimal moisture pushing temperatures to alarming highs.

The consequences are severe: rising cases of heat exhaustion, cramps, and heatstroke; water scarcity; and surging electricity demand straining power grids. Overburdened grids, in turn, worsen air quality.

India must urgently strengthen heat action plans, improve water management, and build climate resilience. Public awareness and infrastructure readiness will be critical in navigating what is fast becoming the country's new normal. India can no longer treat extreme heat as a seasonal inconvenience.

GANPATI BHATT | AKOLA

The spirit of pluralism in Bengal

Bengal's social fabric continues to reflect a deeply rooted commitment to secularism and shared humanity. Contrary to narratives of division, the region has historically demonstrated a unique coexistence—where communities actively participate in each other's traditions, from supporting religious festivities to sharing spaces and responsibilities in daily life.

This ethos owes much to the legacy of the Bengal Renaissance, which prioritised rationality, inclusiveness, and human values over sectarian divisions. Instances of mutual respect—Muslims contributing to Durga Puja arrangements or Hindus supporting Ramadan practices—are not exceptions but reflections of a broader cultural mindset. Despite repeated political attempts to polarise society, Bengal's electorate has often resisted divisive agendas, reaffirming its commitment to pluralism. The 2021 elections served as a reminder that appeals to communal tension may not easily override this deeply embedded identity.

Bengal's example underscores an important lesson: enduring social harmony is built not merely on tolerance, but on active participation and mutual respect across communities.

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

When cricket mirrors a high-stakes sprint

The Indian Premier League (IPL) exemplifies cricket in its most dynamic and unpredictable form, resembling a high-stakes sprint rather than a prolonged contest.

Each match unfolds like a race, where momentum shifts rapidly and a single over can determine the outcome. The recent dominant victory of Royal Challengers Bangalore over Delhi Capitals highlights this intensity. RCB surged ahead with precision and pace, leaving their opponents struggling to keep up. Such performances underline the importance of discipline, strategy, and composure in the shortest format of the game. Every IPL team is packed with world-class talent, yet success depends not just on skill but also on temperament.

A dropped catch, a mistimed shot, or a poorly executed chase can prove decisive. Much like in a race, consistency and timing are critical. For fans, this unpredictability is the tournament's greatest appeal. The IPL is defined by fleeting fortunes and dramatic turnarounds, where reputations can be made or undone in a matter of overs. In this fast-paced arena, only those who adapt quickly and maintain focus can hope to emerge victorious.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDRABAD

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



The sacred relics of Tathagata Buddha descend upon Ladakh

For the first time in India's history, the sacred relics of Tathagata Buddha leave their permanent repository to bless a land that has kept the Dharma alive across centuries of hardship, altitude, and devotion. This is a civilisation saluting itself



GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT

There are moments in a nation's life when history does not merely repeat itself — it deepens. This Wednesday, as the sacred relics of Tathagata Buddha descend upon Ladakh for the first time in India on this scale of public veneration, I find myself reaching not for the language of officialdom, but for something far older: reverence.

For centuries, Ladakh has held the flame. Through brutal winters that freeze rivers solid, through geopolitical pressures that would test the sturdiest of souls, through the isolation of altitude and the remoteness of high passes — the people of Ladakh have kept the Dharma alive with a fidelity that humbles every institution and every government. It is entirely fitting, then, that India's first historic public exposition of the Tathagata relics does not take place in a climate-controlled museum in a metropolitan city. It takes place here, on the Roof of the World, where faith is the very architecture of daily life.

And consider where these relics come from. They originate from Piprahwa, in Uttar Pradesh — the site historically identified with ancient Kapilavastu, the very birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama. Bringing them to Ladakh is, in the most literal sense possible, a homecoming.

A first that carries the weight of ages

The Sacred Exposition of the Holy Relics of the Tathagata carries an official title that is also a declaration: "Peace in Times of Conflict." In a world convulsed by war, fracture, and rising hostility, these words challenge the premise that conflict is inevitable, that strength requires aggression, and that the only answer to uncertainty is force. The Buddha answered that challenge two and a half millennia ago. We bring his physical presence back to remind a watching world that the answer still holds.

The sacred relics of Gautama Buddha — preserved with the utmost sanctity — are travelling for the first time from their permanent place of keeping to be venerated on Indian soil at this scale. Under Z-category security, aboard a special aircraft, they arrive in Leh on April 29 and for fifteen days, from May 1 to 15, beginning on the auspicious occasion of the 2569th Vesak Buddha Purnima, they will be accessible to devotees, monks, scholars, and pilgrims from across the world.

The venues themselves speak volumes. The Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, the Dharma Centre at the historic Leh Palace, the teaching ground of Jive-Tsal — the same sacred earth where His Holiness the Dalai Lama has delivered his teachings — will host this exposition. And the relics will not remain confined to Leh alone. Between 11 and 12 May, they will travel to the remote Zaskar Valley, carrying the Buddha's grace to a community whose Buddhist traditions remain as deep as the gorges of their landscape.

The land that never let the flame go out

To understand why Ladakh is the right home for this occasion, one must understand what Ladakh is. It is not simply a dramatic landscape of monasteries and mountains, however breathtaking that landscape may be. It is a living university of the Dharma. From the serene heights of Hemis Monastery — whose annual festival draws pilgrims from across the Himalayan world — to the ancient frescoes of Alchi, painted in the 10th century and still vivid with devotional genius; from the towering Maitreya Buddha of Diskit, which faces the Shyok River with a gaze of infinite compassion, to the layered wisdom of Thiksey, often compared to the great monasteries of Tibet — Ladakh has been, for over a thousand years, one of the most extraordinary repositories of Buddhist philosophy, art, manuscript tradition, and living practice on the planet. These monasteries, and the monks who inhabit them, are the active transmitters of a tradition that has survived every geopolitical storm the Himalayan region has known. And they have done this work of preservation under conditions that would tax the imagination of most administrators: extreme cold, scarce resources, infrastructural isolation, and a geography that demands courage simply to inhabit. It is India's formal acknowledgement of what Ladakh has always been — not a peripheral territory at the edge of the map, but a beating spiritual heart at the centre of the nation's identity.

A vision rooted in civilisational depth

Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi has consistently described Ladakh as a vibrant centre of Buddhist culture and spirituality. He has spoken often of the resilience and patri-



otism of the Ladakhi people — especially in difficult border conditions — linking their spiritual strength with national resolve and unity. He has made clear that development in Ladakh will go hand in hand with the preservation of its unique culture and environment. As the Prime Minister has emphasised: Ladakh is not only a land of immense strategic importance, but also a living centre of the Buddha's teachings. The visit of the holy relics is both a spiritual blessing and a recognition of Ladakh's centuries-old role in preserving Buddhist heritage, as well as the courage and dedication of its people in serving the nation. This vision — of a Ladakh that is simultaneously a frontier of national security and a citadel of civilisational wisdom — is the most coherent aspect of the place.



MAY THIS SACRED EXPOSITION REMIND EACH OF US — REGARDLESS OF FAITH, REGARDLESS OF WHERE WE STAND — THAT THE DEEPEST HUMAN ASPIRATION HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE SAME: TO LIVE WITHOUT CAUSING SUFFERING, TO ACT WITH WISDOM, AND TO LEAVE THE WORLD A LITTLE MORE AT PEACE THAN WE FOUND IT

The writer is the Union Minister for Culture and Tourism, Government of India

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Tehran was never the point & the map that still burns



WAEEL AWWAD

In moments of heightened crisis, great powers often fall prey to a familiar illusion: the belief that force can impose order on complexity. Today, as tensions between the United States and Iran continue to simmer, that illusion is once again shaping strategic thinking in ways that risk destabilising not only the Middle East, but the international system itself. Regardless of intention, the elimination of Iranian state capacity produces consequences that align with long-standing US strategic interests—BRI disruption, INSTC collapse, dollar hegemony reinforcement, Russia-

China exposure. These consequences are real whether Washington planned them or not. What we are witnessing is not the calculated aggression of a collapsing empire, nor a coherent grand strategy aimed at reshaping the global order through a single decisive war. It is something more unsettling: a world in transition, where power is diffuse, rivalries overlap, and traditional instruments of control are increasingly ill-suited to the complexity they seek to manage. The United States remains, by any meaningful measure, the world's most formidable military and financial power. Its global reach is unmatched; its alliances extensive. Yet power today no longer guarantees control. The post-Cold War moment of unchallenged primacy has given way to a far more contested landscape.

China has emerged as a systemic economic and technological competitor, while Russia continues to assert itself as a disruptive geopolitical force. In such an environment, the temptation to act decisively is understandable. But here lies the paradox: the ability to strike is not the same as the ability to shape outcomes. The capacity to destroy does not confer the power to rebuild or to control what follows. Iran embodies this paradox. It is not a conventional great power, yet it is far from weak. Its strength lies in networks, alliances, and asymmetric strategies that defy traditional military calculations. To imagine that it can be "obliterated" as a strategic actor is to misunderstand both the nature of the Iranian state and the dynamics of the region it inhabits. The Middle East is not a vacuum. It is a dense web of political, sectarian, and strategic relationships, where the collapse of one node reverberates across many others. It would radiate outwards—into Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and the Gulf—activating a complex ecosystem of state and non-state actors whose interests are deeply intertwined with Tehran's. The economic shock would be immediate. The Strait of Hormuz, through which a significant share of global energy flows, would become a flashpoint. Even the perception of risk in this narrow corridor would send shockwaves through global markets, driving up energy prices, disrupting supply chains, and amplifying inflationary pressures worldwide. For much of the developing world, the consequences would be severe and immediate. Rising fuel costs would strain already fragile economies, while disruptions in fertiliser and food supply chains could undermine agricultural stability. These are not abstract risks—they translate into real human hardship. Yet the most profound consequences may be strategic.



A large-scale confrontation with Iran would unfold within a broader geopolitical contest. For China and Russia, such a conflict would present both opportunity and narrative: an opportunity to expand influence in a distracted global environment, and a narrative reinforcing perceptions of Western unilateralism and instability. Far from restoring American primacy, such a scenario could accelerate its erosion. This does not mean the world is on the brink of a third world war. Structural realities still act as a brake on direct great-power confrontation. Neither China nor Russia has an interest in entering a full-scale war with the United States over Iran. The costs would be prohibitive; the outcomes uncertain. But the absence of global war does not imply stability. What is emerging instead is the normalisation of what might be called "dirty wars"—prolonged, ambiguous conflicts fought through proxies, economic pressure, cyber operations, and information warfare. These conflicts blur the line between war and peace, erode norms, and create conditions for incremental escalation without clear thresholds. The Middle East has become a central arena for such dynamics. The wars in Iraq and Syria have already demonstrated the limits of military intervention in producing stable outcomes.

To repeat this pattern on a larger scale would not signal strength. It would reveal strategic stagnation. This brings us to a critical question: is the United States still acting as though it is the sole superpower? In rhetoric, perhaps. In reality, increasingly less so. The constraints it faces—economic, political, and strategic—are real. Recognising them is not a sign of weakness, but of adaptation. The era in which dominance could be imposed through force alone has passed. What is required now is a recalibration—one that prioritises stability over spectacle, and long-term outcomes over short-term demonstrations of power. For Iran, this means acknowledging that its own strategies of influence and asymmetry carry risks not only for its adversaries, but for the region as a whole.

For the United States, it means recognising that the pursuit of absolute dominance in a multipolar world is not only unrealistic, but counterproductive. The alternative is not victory. It is entanglement. History offers a sobering lesson: great powers rarely collapse through decisive defeat. More often, they erode through overextension—trapped in conflicts that drain resources without delivering resolution. The real danger, therefore, is not a single catastrophic war, but a series of prolonged engagements that cumulatively weaken strategic position. We are entering an era defined not by decisive victories, but by persistent instability—where crises are continuous, resolutions elusive, and the line between competition and conflict increasingly blurred. Avoiding this trajectory requires restraint, diplomacy, and strategic clarity. It requires acknowledging a fundamental truth: the destruction of a civilisation is not a strategy. It is a failure of imagination. Iran, with its deep historical roots and complex societal fabric, cannot be reduced to a target. Nor can the Middle East be reshaped through force without consequence. The belief that such actions could pave the way for confronting other global powers is not only flawed—it is dangerously detached from the realities of interdependence that define today's world. The war on Iran is a structural intervention—whether consciously Mackinderian or not—whose intended consequence is the disruption of the Eurasian connectivity architecture, and whose unintended consequence is the acceleration of the very axis consolidation it sought to prevent. It is not the opening move in a planned confrontation with China and Russia. It is the opening of a window of maximum vulnerability during which that confrontation becomes more likely-initiated not by Washington, but by Beijing. And that choice, like the currents that pass through the Strait of Hormuz, cannot be deferred indefinitely.

The Ministry of Culture, the Archaeological Survey of India, the International Buddhist Confederation, and the local organisations of Ladakh — the Gonpa Association, the Buddhist Association, and the UT Administration under Lieutenant Governor Shri Vinai Kumar Saxena — have worked together with a unity that mirrors the very teaching the relics carry.

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Jan Vishwas 2026 and the expanding drive for decriminalisation

NATHISHIA CHANDHY, SIDDHARTH JHA AND ANKEETAA MAHESHWARI

The Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026 represents one of the most far-reaching attempts in recent years to rationalise India's regulatory framework. Covering 784 provisions across 79 Central Acts administered by 23 ministries, the Bill significantly expands the scope of the Union government's effort to reduce the criminalisation of regulatory non-compliance. Having been passed by the Rajya Sabha on April 2, 2026, it now awaits Presidential assent.

The legislation replaces the earlier Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025, which was examined by a Select Committee of the Lok Sabha before being withdrawn in March 2026. In comparison, the 2026 Bill is substantially wider in scope. While the 2025 version proposed the decriminalisation of provisions across 17 Acts administered by 10 ministries, the current Bill adds 62 more Central Acts and expands the number of provisions examined within the previously covered statutes.

At its core, the Jan Vishwas exercise seeks to apply the principle of proportionality in punishment. The underlying premise is that not all instances of non-compliance warrant criminal prosecution or the threat of imprisonment. By recalibrating penalties for regulatory offences, the legislation attempts to strike a balance

between ensuring compliance and reducing the burdens associated with criminal enforcement.

To achieve this, the Bill relies on several mechanisms of decriminalisation and rationalisation. First, many offences are reclassified from criminal offences to civil contraventions, typically by replacing imprisonment with monetary penalties. This shift removes the need for criminal prosecution in routine compliance matters, thereby easing pressure on the judicial system while reducing the risk of incarceration for relatively minor violations. Second, the Bill introduces graded penalties and compliance opportunities before punitive action is triggered. Third, offences that are considered redundant or outdated have been omitted altogether. Fourth, several offences have been made compoundable, allowing violations to be settled through the payment of prescribed sums rather than through criminal proceedings. Finally, in certain cases, monetary penalties have been enhanced and timelines introduced for their payment in order to retain a deterrent effect.

According to estimates released by the Press Information Bureau, the 2026 Bill proposes to reclassify 432 criminal offences as civil offences. It also compounds or reduces jail terms for 17 offences and removes imprisonment and/or fines entirely for 244 offences. In scale and ambition, the exercise marks a significant effort to modernise India's regulatory architecture.

The breadth of the Bill is reflected in the wide range of sectors it touches. The legislation proposes amendments to laws governing industry, mining, coal, power, petroleum and natural gas,



finance, transport and infrastructure, textiles, food safety and healthcare, as well as shipping and ports.

One notable development is the inclusion of several sectoral legislations that were previously outside the scope of the reform. In an earlier analysis published in Scroll.in, "With fines instead of jail terms, new bill aims to simplify legal compliance", we had noted that key legislations regulating sectors such as mining had remained largely untouched in the earlier iteration of the Bill. The 2026 version addresses this gap by proposing amendments to seven laws governing coal and non-coal mining, as well as the petroleum and natural gas sectors.

Under the mining framework regulating offshore and onshore extraction, breaches of licence conditions that previously attracted criminal penalties are proposed to be treated as civil violations, albeit accompanied by significant-

ly higher monetary penalties. At the same time, criminal liability is retained for more serious misconduct such as illegal mining, suggesting an attempt to differentiate between routine compliance lapses and more serious violations.

The Bill also undertakes significant rationalisation in the transport sector. Amendments have been proposed to ten legislations governing shipping, ports and motorways. For instance, under the Inland Vessels Act, 2021, 20 of the 32 offences have been decriminalised. Across these statutes, offences have either been made compoundable or reclassified as civil contraventions.

Beyond sectoral regulation, the Jan Vishwas exercise also seeks to make laws more citizen-centric by easing certain everyday compliance requirements. Amendments have been proposed to nearly 45 provisions of the Motor Vehicles Act, 1988.

Similarly, amendments to the Railways Act, 1989 introduce a conditional decriminalisation framework. Offenders are first given the opportunity to settle violations by paying a prescribed penalty. Criminal consequences, including imprisonment or fines, arise only if the penalty order is not complied with. Offences such as travelling without a valid ticket, unauthorised occupation of berths, and hawking goods without authorisation fall within this framework.

Changes proposed to the Metro Railways (Operation and Maintenance) Act, 2002 follow a similar approach. Activities such as causing nuisance while intoxicated, conducting demonstrations, unauthorised sale of goods within metro premises, or defacing public notices are pro-

posed to be treated as civil violations attracting monetary penalties. In cases where imprisonment provisions remain, extreme punishments such as life imprisonment have been rationalised.

While the Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2026 is an ambitious and necessary reform, its scale raises important questions. The framework guiding which offences are decriminalised remains largely unclear, risking an ad hoc approach driven by administrative discretion rather than consistent principles.

This inconsistency is also visible in the design of penalties. While some statutes include clear timelines and consequences for delay, others do not, weakening the overall coherence of the reform.

Equally, assessing success remains a challenge. Goals such as improving the 'ease of doing business' and 'ease of living' require measurable benchmarks. Without these, it will be difficult to evaluate impact or determine the need for course correction.

Ultimately, the success of the Jan Vishwas initiative will depend not just on the number of provisions amended, but on the clarity of its guiding principles and the rigour with which its outcomes are implemented and assessed.

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One is really not sure about the antics, or the lack of it, of the central banks. Sometimes they behave smartly, sometimes they seem unsure, and there are times when they are clueless. Possibly, it is because monetary economics, which is easy to describe in theory, as are other forms, is difficult to implement in the real world. Yes, higher interest rates will curb inflation, but do they always? Yes, low interest can spur growth, but does it have a cause-and-effect outcome? Of course, strictures can save the currency, but have they done it anywhere in the world, unless backed by improving or strong macro fundamentals? This is why it still seems inexplicable why the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) opted for the extreme measures some weeks ago to strongly protect the rupee. Yes, the rupee was down in the dumps, over ₹95 to a dollar. Yes, the actions strengthened it to between ₹92 and ₹93. But what is the point? It is already more than ₹94 to a dollar, and may soon breach the ₹95 mark if the Iran war continues without a peace settlement.

Do not forget that the RBI has removed several of the earlier measures. In the process, it was criticised by the foreign investors, who warned that the moves were clearly anti-reforms. Indeed, the central bank had to accept and accede that the measures were temporary, and will be removed soon, as some of them were. In effect, what the central bank achieved was to hear criticism, and postpone the inevitable. Possibly, this was the crucial objective, that is to delay the process, and ensure that the fall is smoother, and indicates stability of the economy. This becomes more critical when one hears similar things about the strong fundamentals from varied Indian and foreign sources. In almost every report, both positive or negative, there are claims about how strong the Indian economy is, and what is happening with the rupee, Indian equities, inflation, and GDP growth are temporary trends. It seems as if there is a concerted effort to somehow string the India story towards a happy ending, even if the sub-plots point towards volatility.

Yesterday, the rupee opened weaker, more towards ₹94.5 to a dollar, before it gained a bit towards the end of the day. The reason was an upward movement in the price of global crude oil, with the Brent crude hovering near \$110 a barrel. According to a media report, "Importers are looking to hedge positions to take advantage of the current levels in case the rupee starts depreciating sharply.... The RBI is also likely intervening in the market to stem a free fall. But the central bank is unlikely to be as aggressive as it used to be, and would instead take a more neutral stance by entering the markets intermittently...." In this single sentence, we can view two trends, even contradictions. Traders, and obviously speculators feel that the rupee may go down further, which was their feelings earlier when the RBI imposed the strictures. In effect, nothing has changed. If the RBI does not wish to aggressively stem the free fall now, why did it do it a few weeks ago? As we said earlier, things do not make sense, at least objectively.

Maybe there were other objectives that were more important a few weeks ago. The RBI, as well as the ruling regime, was being overtly and unfairly criticised for the falling rupee. Comparisons were made on memes about the state of the rupee over the past two decades. In some cases, as is normally the case, they were unfair. Despite a larger fall in terms of value in the recent past, a percentage comparison showed discrepancies, which an average reader and viewer failed to grasp. In addition, a few economists possibly goofed up when they tried to spin the yarn, and explained that a weak rupee is good for the economy. Everyone expected the rupee to breach ₹100 to a dollar, which would have happened a week or two ago if the earlier trends had continued. The RBI was tasked to stop the decline, even if temporarily, given the social, political, business, and economic implications. The image of the central bank and nation did not matter. What was crucial was to send a strong message that India will not allow the rupee to falter, at least not for a month or so. Even later, it wants a smooth fall.

This explains why analysts are slightly apprehensive when they predict the rupee's future. One of them, who was quoted in a media report, explained this in a technical manner, "The rupee continues to trade like a coiled spring, conserving energy before its next decisive move. The ₹93.5-93.8 zone remains a strong demand base, where dips can get absorbed, while ₹94.5-94.8 is expected to act as a resistance zone." Hence, it seems that ₹95 is the RBI's benchmark, and the central bank will forever be careful once the rupee breaches it. But if peace does not prevail soon, and war continues, the task of the central bank will become more difficult, or possibly easy, as time moves on.

IDBI Bank is going, going, going...

Billed as a test case for bank divestment, it is stuck for four years

Over the past few days, after the miseries in March 2026, there are several positive news that have emanated from official agencies. Two days ago, a core group of secretaries, which is headed by the cabinet secretary, discussed the future roadmap of how to privatise IDBI Bank after past failures. Before the meeting, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman indicated that the so-called strategic sale, which includes change in ownership and management, was on course. "There is no halting. It will happen," she said. Now, the new timelines indicate that the process will be complete by September 2026.

One of the prominent issues relates to valuation, or rather the mismatch between what the government expects, and what the willing investors are ready to pay. In March 2026, the plan was postponed when the private bids were below the expected reserve price, or the minimum sale price that was officially decided. What is at stake is a possible sale of either a part or full of the just over 60 per cent stake, which is jointly held by LIC and the government. It is believed to be a test case for both divestment, and banking reforms.

Hence, the core group is expected to review the valuation norms, and tweak them if necessary, and revise the timelines. However, experts contend that this is possibly the worst time to sell a public asset, especially since the stock markets are down because of the ongoing Iran war, and there are pressures related to future corporate earnings in general. To fix a reserve price before the end of the conflict may result in a similar valuation gap, as was evident in March. It may be better to wait for the markets to perk up, which they will immediately after peace because of excitement, and if

crude oil prices slide. IDBI Bank's share price gyrations over the past 10 months indicate the state of Indian equities, as well as the challenges faced by the bank, many of which were driven by the divestment process, or the lack of it.

In June 2025, the price quoted over ₹100 per share, when the privatisation talks engulfed newspaper headlines. It dropped to ₹85 by August 2025, and went up again to over ₹100 in November the same year. This was due to the uncertainty about the stake sale, with the up-down movements forced by positive or negative news.

By the time private investors submitted their financial bids by February 2026, as reported by the media, the share price reached a 52-week closing-peak of ₹116 (intra-day 52-week high is ₹118). Then it dropped like a hot potato. As news emanated that there were problems, and the bids were rejected in March 2026 because of low valuations, the stock slumped to a low of just over ₹60 per share (52-week low is ₹61). Thus, in a matter of one month, the price was down by almost 50 per cent. One can assume that the free fall was partially due to the divestment blues and the bleeding due to the Iran war.

Only during the month of April 2026, IDBI Bank's stock price went northwards, and crossed ₹76, or a gain of 25 per cent. This may be because of speculation that divestment was merely postponed, and not given up. Of course, the share gained further last week as the indications became more positive. An hour before the close of trading yesterday, the stock was down one per cent despite the news of the fresh official talks to take the divestment forward.

After the initial enthusiasm, investors' energy may be dulled by lack of a concrete timeline, or decisions that clarify the future roadmap.

IDBI Bank's downfall started 15 years ago when, thanks partially due to mismanagement, and the Great Recession and financial crisis of 2008, the bank was saddled with rising bad loans, and weak financials. In less than a decade, by 2019, the government asked the state-owned insurer, LIC, to step in, acquire a majority stake, and assume management control. By late-2022, it was decided to dispose of the just over 60 per cent stake held together by LIC and the government. By early-2023, private investors lined up with expressions of interest which, according to a report, indicated "initial enthusiasm."

According to a recent media report, "The privatisation of IDBI Bank is a key test case for India's broader disinvestment strategy, particularly in the financial sector." In effect, if successful, it will "signal investor confidence in banking reforms, set precedent for future PSU bank privatisation, and help the government to unlock value from holdings." However, the road ahead is full of obstacles because of the geopolitical disruptions, state of the stock markets, and uneasiness among the foreign investors about valuations and corporate earnings, despite the deep corrections in Indian equities over the past few months.

Although the bank's Q4-26 results are not out, the financials have wavered over the past few quarters. Total revenues have dipped thrice, quarter-on-quarter, and zoomed twice in the past five quarters (from Q2-25 to Q3-26). Similarly, net profits during the same period went up continuously for four quarters, quarter-on-quarter, and doubled from over ₹1,800 crore in Q2-25 to ₹3,600 crore in Q2-26. In Q3-26, the net profits thudded down to just above ₹1,900 crore, or almost back to a year ago (Q3-25). Uncertain revenues, and a sharp dip in net profits in the December-25 quarter have not enthused the investors much.

According to AI-assisted search, although IDBI Bank has improved the quality of its assets and loans, especially since the LIC takeover, it "faced declines in core income." For example, in Q3-26, there were "significant drops in its core net interest income, which fell by 24.1 per cent year-on-year.... This decline is attributed to lower interest earned, and increased funding costs." Yet, bad loans are down by a percentage point between Q3-25 and Q3-26, and advances are up by 14 per cent. Thus, the bank is possibly squeezed between the good and bad.

The fact is that LIC is more of a passive investor, and uses its huge cash flows to hold large stakes in renowned firms. In the past though, in the pre-reform days, when state-owned shareholders dictated board decisions, and influenced corporate strategies, LIC was indeed seriously involved in the management of several firms. But times have changed, and so has its outlook. Thus, it is imperative for LIC and the government to sell their stakes in IDBI Bank, and soon.

OUR TAKE



Left-Handed Economist

Win the war, lose the peace?

Iran may bend in the end but it will not break due to the creek



The headline that we have used is a sub-head that appears in a recent article in Foreign Affairs magazine on the possibility of the Third Islamic Republic in Iran, and the "war's unintended consequences for Iran, the Middle East, and the global order." Written by Suzanne Maloney, who works at the Brookings Institution, it explores the various dimensions of the war in terms of future gains and losses for the various participants, stakeholders, and mere observers. Our strapline borrows from the first line after the sub-head, which reads, "Although they may bend, Iran's power brokers are unlikely to break."

War, and the hard line that the Iranian leaders adopted this time, by proving that they can "impose painful costs on the global economy," will enable them, or at least the hardliners hope, to re-establish their "regional sway." Something they lost in the past decade or two. For years, Iran has believed that the world, especially the western powers, owe a lot to it. This time, if the nation emerges intact from the war, and still in a position to choke the Strait of Hormuz and Red Sea, as it seems, it intends to "collect on that (decades-old) debt."

Of course, if this happens, there is a huge scare among the neighbours in the Middle East that Iran will emerge weaker but also "emboldened." Its economy will be in a bad shape, and require money from the West (definitely the US) and East (maybe China, even Russia), but it will be aware that it can push the world on its knees. "An occasional drone crashing through the window of a luxury hotel or into a busy airport will be more than sufficient to raise the risk premium for investors, and prompt second thoughts among tourists," writes Maloney.

The fact is that Tehran is surrounded by powerful and influential nations, whose combined military powers may be immense, especially as they are backed by the US, but whose sprawling economies are somehow fragile with a few weak spots. These were evident as Iran randomly bombarded airports and residential areas, apart from energy infrastructure in Dubai, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. Not just foreigners, but even residents fled, and sought refuge in either quieter places within the nations, or outside. Several Indians in Dubai immediately relocated to their Indian homes after years and decades.

Yet, as Maloney warns, Iran cannot be complacent, and sense victory in every possible outcome to the war. There are enough reasons to conclude that it can miscalculate. "The regime may have mounted an effective asymmetric counterattack that threatens to wreak havoc on the global economy, but its conven-

tional military capabilities were largely destroyed, and the steady erosion of an entire echelon of senior leaders will take a significant toll on its operational and governing capabilities," feels Maloney. Some experts contend that the loss of leaders is a boon in disguise for the radicals, as it marks the entry of a stauncher and conservative son of the dead Iranian Supreme Leader.

"It is also possible that Tehran will win the war but lose the peace, as a result of its recalcitrance, unfounded optimism, or internal disarray, just as previous Iranian leaders did at crucial juncture in the war with Iraq (in the 1980s)," writes Maloney. During the beginning of that war, the Gulf nations offered a solution to end it. They offered \$25 billion as reparations to Iran, which insisted that the figure needs to be six times higher, and continued the war. The following six years destroyed Iran, even as it devastated Iraq. This time, as the Iran-US talks continue, and falter, Iran needs to be smarter, and know when to withdraw militarily to enrich itself financially, and industrially.

The US may need to learn to live with the geopolitical tensions around the world. Whatever may be the peaceful solutions, Iran may give indirect support to others who

wish to disrupt the global order. After these events, Russia is unlikely to accept any plan to end the Ukraine war that does not lead to appropriation of huge territories. The Houthis in Yemen may become fiercer, even if they lose the support from Iran. Israel will wield its military power, yet again, soon in the future. Even regional powers like Pakistan will make their moves, even as a superpower like China plays its own version of a chess-like game.

Europe may forever be squeezed between the moves made by Russia and China in the future, and what happens in the Middle East. The former will hope that NATO does not degrade, and remains in place despite Donald Trump's anger and warnings, or else it will need to beef up its military, energy, and other levels of security. Although the Iran war hurt the Asian consumers the most, Europe was terribly hit by the Russia-Ukraine war. Even in the present case, if the Iran war continues for another month, Europe will feel the heat, or lack of it.

What is of utmost interest, at least in regional terms, will be a key question on most minds. Will the conflict lead to a Third Islamic Republic? If it does, the future may be highly uncertain for the Middle East, the US, Europe, and Asia, apart from Central Asia.

Some experts contend, as mentioned earlier, Iran will become more radical under Mojtaba Khamenei, the son of the dead Supreme Leader. The war enabled a smoother-than-expected succession. Others indicate that it will lead to a power vacuum once the war ends.

"Finally, even if the Islamic Republic holds out through the active phase of conflict (as it seems it will), the aftermath could spell its undoing. At present, there may be no coherent, competent political organisation that can mount a meaningful challenge to even a war-weakened regime. But the tremors from the conflict will be long-lasting, and their impact will unfold, and probably magnify over time," predicts Maloney. Hence, their current victory, which is what will be called whatever may be the solution, may "well sow the seeds of the regime's demise" in the future.

Yet another article in the same issue of the Foreign Affairs magazine pins the hope on the younger generation, a Tehran Spring along the lines of the Arab Spring years ago. "Iran's younger generation could also prove to be a potent ally. The young have connections to the 1979 revolution, and know the regime only for corruption and cruelty," writes the author. They need someone to lead them to political salvation.

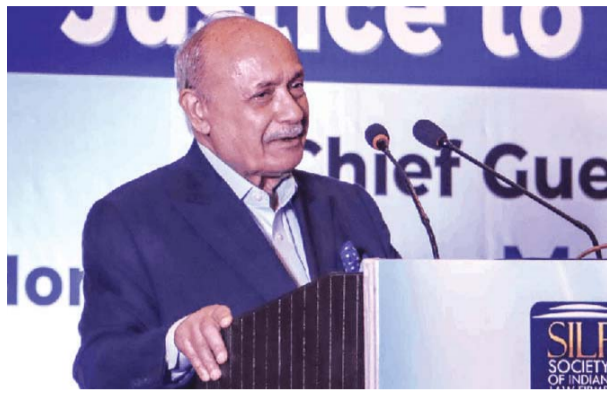


India should not be compared with China, says Indo-US business leader

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Jaipur

Reacting to a social media post shared by US President Donald Trump that referred to India with a derogatory remark, a business leader of the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (IACC) on Tuesday said India is 'not a hole', but a 'whole' in all respects, including in upholding the rule of law and moving towards economic prosperity.

"We are much better. We are not a hole, but whole in all respects, in adhering to democratic principles, upholding the rule of law and moving towards economic prosperity," said Lalit Bhasin, former national president of IACC. The remarks were in response to a social media comment by American



radio show host Michael Savage, shared by Trump last week, that referred to India and some other countries as "hellholes" in the context of immigration.

Hours after the post, a spokesperson of the US embassy in New Delhi sought to control the damage by putting out a message, saying,

"India is a great country with a very good friend of mine at the top". The Indian Government, on April 23, termed the post as "uninformed" and "inappropriate".

Speaking at the launch of IACC's Rajasthan chapter here in the presence of Jonathan Heimer, Minister Counsellor for Commercial Affairs at the

US Embassy, Bhasin further said that the US Government must get a message, through Heimer, that India should not be compared with China.

"My request to Jonathan Heimer, which should be conveyed to the US Government, is that India is not a 'hell hole'. Please don't compare it with China," Bhasin said.

Bhasin also said that Rajasthan's industrial growth and investor-friendly policies make it a natural choice for expanding India-US engagement. Heimer also spoke on the partnership between India and the US, saying this would play a key role in shaping the future.

"Over the four years I have spent in India, your friendship, warmth and shared commitment to strengthening US-India business ties have been extraordinary," he said.

Stock markets decline amid surging oil prices, foreign fund outflows

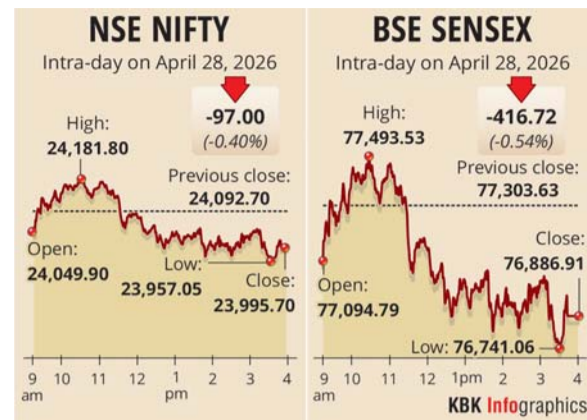
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Mumbai

Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty buckled under selling pressure on Tuesday as a sharp rally in oil prices and foreign fund outflows dented investors' sentiment.

The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 416.72 points, or 0.54 per cent, to settle at 76,886.91. During the day, it lost 562.57 points, or 0.72 per cent, to 76,741.06.

The 50-share gauge NSE Nifty dropped 97 points, or 0.40 per cent, to end at 23,995.70. From the 30-Sensex firms, Axis Bank, HCL Tech, InterGlobe Aviation, Maruti, State Bank of India and ICICI Bank were among the biggest laggards.

In contrast, Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel, Tech



Mahindra and Sun Pharma were among the gainers.

Brent crude, the global oil benchmark, jumped 2.97 per cent to \$111.4 per barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 1,151.48 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. "Indian

equity markets traded under pressure, ending in the red as unresolved tensions in the Middle East and persistent disruptions to energy supply, particularly the continued closure of the Strait of Hormuz, weighed on investor sentiment," Ponmudi R, CEO of Enrich

Money, an online trading and wealth tech firm, said. The sharp rise in crude oil prices above \$110, continued disruption in the Strait of Hormuz, rupee depreciation beyond 94.5 and sustained FII outflows underscore mounting macroeconomic pressures on Indian markets, he added.

In Asian markets, Japan's Nikkei 225 index, Shanghai's SSE Composite index, and Hong Kong's Hang Seng index ended lower, while South Korea's benchmark Kospi settled higher. Markets in Europe were trading in positive territory.

US markets ended flat on Monday. On Monday, the Sensex jumped 639.42 points or 0.83 per cent to settle at 77,303.63. The Nifty climbed 194.75 points or 0.81 per cent to close at 24,092.70.

SBI-led banks financial creditors in Reliance Infratel case: SC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

In a significant verdict, the Supreme Court on Tuesday ruled that liabilities arising from corporate guarantees squarely constitute "financial debt" under the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC).

A bench comprising justices PS Narasimha and Alok Aradha upheld the validity and enforceability of corporate guarantees and recognised a consortium of banks led by State Bank of India (SBI) as financial creditors in the insolvency proceedings of Reliance Infratel Ltd (RITL).

The bench dealt with three key legal issues including whether the corporate guarantees executed by the corporate Debtor constitute "financial

debt" within the meaning of Section 5(8) of the IBC. The second issue was whether the claims of the SBI and banks were liable to be rejected for non-submission or improper verification of documents and if the findings recorded by the tribunals warrant interference.

"The corporate guarantees executed by the corporate debtor (RITL) constitute "financial debt" within the meaning of Section 5(8) of the Code. The appellants (SBI-led banks) are entitled to be recognised as financial creditors... The rejection of claims of the appellants, by the NCLT and NCLAT are legally unsustainable. The impugned orders suffer from perversity and warrant interference by this court," the bench said while allowing the appeal of SBI-led banks.



The top court set aside the orders of the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) and the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), which had previously stripped a consortium of Indian banks led by SBI of their status as financial creditors. The case arose during the Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP) of Reliance Infratel Limited (RITL). An SBI-led consortium, including Bank of India, UCO

Bank, Syndicate Bank, Oriental Bank of Commerce, and Indian Overseas Bank, had claimed over ₹3,628 crore based on corporate guarantees executed by RITL to secure loans for its group entities, RCOM and RTL.

The claim was challenged by Doha Bank, an External Commercial Borrowings (ECB) lender, which argued that the guarantees were suspicious, insufficiently stamped, and not properly disclosed in financial statements.

Both the NCLT and NCLAT had upheld these objections, directing the removal of the SBI consortium from the Committee of Creditors (CoC). The top court reaffirmed that under Section 5(8) of the IBC, any liability in respect of a guarantee for money borrowed against interest is a "financial debt".

FTA to help India's engineering exports to New Zealand double to \$280-300 mn in 5 years

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Kolkata

India's engineering exports to New Zealand are poised to double over the next five years from \$140.5 million to \$280-300 million, following the signing of a free trade agreement (FTA) that grants zero-duty market access to all Indian goods, officials said.

Industry body EEPIC India's Chairman Pankaj Chadha said the pact would provide a strong tailwind to the sector, particularly MSMEs, by lowering trade barriers



and ensuring stable market access in a relatively small but high-potential destination.

Engineering shipments to New Zealand have already shown steady traction, rising

around 8 per cent to \$140.5 million in 2025-26 from \$129.8 million in the previous fiscal.

Growth has been led by automobiles, dairy sector machinery and medical and scientific instruments, while metal-based products such as iron and steel, aluminium and zinc have also contributed meaningfully.

"With zero-duty access and predictable trade rules, there is a clear opportunity to scale up engineering exports to around \$280-300 million over the next five years," Chadha said.

Infosys, Accenture lead LinkedIn's 2026 list of top companies for career growth in India

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

IT major Infosys has emerged as the top company for career growth in India, followed by Accenture and Amazon, according to LinkedIn's 2026 Top Companies' list released on Tuesday.

The 10th edition of the annual list, which features 25 large companies, is dominated by technology powerhouses, global consulting firms, and financial giants. JPMorgan Chase and SAP secured the fourth and fifth positions, respectively.

The 2026 list witnessed ten new entrants. Notable new



additions include tech firms such as SAP, NVIDIA, HP, Microsoft, Sandisk, Marvell Technology, and Thomson Reuters.

Geographically, Bengaluru continues to lead as the prominent talent hub for

these top companies. Hyderabad follows closely, while Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai remain key hiring centres for large corporations. The report highlighted a shifting focus in hiring trends, noting that compa-

nies are increasingly looking for professionals who can blend technical fluency with human skills—such as communication and problem-solving—that artificial intelligence (AI) cannot replace.

"This year's top companies list clearly signals that hirers are looking at proof of skills as much as they are looking at their presence. Companies across technology, finance, and software are looking for professionals who can pair irreplaceable human strengths with the ability to work alongside AI to maximise efficiency and value," Nirajita Banerjee, LinkedIn Career Expert and India Senior Managing Editor, said.

Commerce ministry notifies decision to allow exports of 25 lakh tonnes of additional wheat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The Commerce Ministry's arm DGFT has notified the Government's decision to permit 25 lakh tonnes of wheat exports.

On April 20, the Centre permitted exports of an additional 25 lakh tonne of wheat, considering a comfortable stock position amid the likelihood of another strong harvest.

With this, a total of 50 lakh tonne of wheat and 10 lakh tonne of wheat products have now been permitted for exports.

"The export policy of wheat...continues to remain



prohibited. However, export of an additional 25 Lakh Metric Tonnes (LMT) of wheat is permitted," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) has said in a notification.

It said that the detailed modalities for this will be notified through a separate

order. "Furthermore, the existing policy condition mentioned in DGFT...dated May 13, 2022, continues to apply, wherein export shall also be allowed on the basis of permission granted by the Government of India to other countries to meet their food security needs and based on the request of their Governments, over and above the said permitted amount of additional 25 LMT of wheat," it added.

The country's wheat production is pegged at 120.2 million tonne for the 2025-26 crop year (July-June) as per the second advance estimate of the Agriculture Ministry.

Peak power demand nears record 256 GW for second time on Monday



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

India's peak power demand neared record levels for the second consecutive time on Monday, reaching 255.85 GW, driven by intense heat wave conditions that pushed usage of cooling appliances like air conditioners and desert coolers.

The surge in power demand, amid severe heat-wave conditions across North, Central and Western India, resulted in a significant rise in energy consumption, as users relied on air conditioners and cooling devices to beat the heat.

According to the power ministry data, peak power demand was recorded at 255.85 GW (nearly 256GW) on Monday, April 27, 2026.

Peak power demand started surging in the second half of this month and touched 252.07 GW on Friday, April 24. It had eclipsed this level on Saturday, April 25, at 256.11 GW.

However, the peak power demand moderated to 238.15 GW on Sunday, April 26, down from the record 256 GW the previous day, as most commercial and industrial establishments remained closed.

Indian fintech funding holds steady at \$513 mn in Q1 2026; deal volume halves

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Funding in India's financial technology (fintech) sector remained largely flat at \$513 million in the first quarter of 2026, but the number of deals plummeted by 54 per cent year-on-year, signalling a structural shift towards fewer, larger investments, market intelligence firm Tracxn said on Tuesday.

According to the 'Geo Quarterly Report - India FinTech Q1 2026' by Tracxn, the sector witnessed just 45 funding rounds in the January-March period, a sharp decline from 99 rounds in the corresponding quarter of 2025.

Total funding saw a marginal 2 per cent increase from \$503 million in Q1 2025, though it declined 9 per cent sequentially from \$562 million in Q4 2025.

"The flat headline masks a structural shift: the same capital concentrated across half the deals, with average cheque sizes more than doubling. The signal is not retreat, but selection: investors are writing bigger cheques into fewer, later-stage companies with demonstrated unit economics," the report noted.

A significant chunk of the quarter's capital was driven by a single mega-deal. Mumbai-based housing finance platform Weaver



raised \$156 million, accounting for nearly a third of the total funding in the quarter.

In terms of cities, Mumbai dethroned Bengaluru as the top destination for fintech investments. Mumbai-based startups captured 61 per cent (\$311 million) of the total funding, a massive jump from just 9 per cent a year ago. Bengaluru, which commanded 51 per cent of capital in Q1 2025, trailed with a 30 per cent share (\$152 million) in Q1 2026, followed by Gurugram, Delhi, and Chennai.

The report attributed this geographic shift to the rise of lending and affordable-housing fintechs, sectors where Mumbai's proximity to banks and non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) provide a structural advantage.

Four of the top five Q1 2026 funding rounds - Weaver, Ecofy, Easy Home Finance and Idfy - are Mumbai-headquartered.

Women's employment rate has gone up: Mandaviya

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

The women's employment rate has increased to 39 per cent in 2025 from 22 per cent in 2017, indicating a rise in work opportunities for them, Labour and Employment Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said on Tuesday.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has witnessed new, enabling opportunities opening up for women, leading to a transformative improvement in female employment indicators," he said while addressing a Swiggy event, Swiggy here.

He informed that the Female Labour Force Participation Rate (FLFPR) has risen from 23.3 per cent in 2017-18 to 40 per cent in



2025. The Female Worker Population Ratio (FWPR) has correspondingly increased from 22 per cent in 2017 to nearly 39 per cent in 2025, he added.

Further, the Female Unemployment Rate (FUR) has declined from 5.6 per cent to 3.1 per cent, suggesting that women who seek employment are now more successfully finding it, he

noted. Various survey reports have indicated that women are getting more employment opportunities, he pointed out.

The equitable participation of women in the workforce is both a social imperative and an economic necessity, he added.

"Empowering women is central to building a Viksit Bharat," he affirmed.

Duty concessions under New Zealand FTA to help boost exports of single malt whisky: CIABC

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ New Delhi

Duty concessions on Indian liquor under the free trade agreement with New Zealand will boost exports of single malt whisky and enhance price competitiveness for other items in the island nation, industry body CIABC said on Tuesday.

The Confederation of Indian Alcoholic Beverage Companies (CIABC) also said that given the current low export base, the agreement

is likely to support market entry and brand building, particularly in segments such as whisky, rum and premium Indian spirits.

"The FTA is expected to provide duty-free access for Indian alcoholic beverage exports into New Zealand, improving price competitiveness for Indian products in that market," the body's Director General Anant S Iyer said. India's exports of spirits is just around \$1 million per annum to New Zealand. Currently, some premium



liquors, particularly Indian single malts, are being exported to New Zealand.

Hopefully with the free trade agreement in place,

Indian alcobev companies will increase their focus and develop the market, he said, adding that wines and beer have more consumption

share in New Zealand. "With duty concessions on Indian liquor, we see exports of Indian single malts, which have earned laurels globally, getting a boost in New Zealand," he said.

India's alcobev exports to New Zealand are currently modest. In 2024-25, beer exports stood at around \$0.34 million, followed by whisky (\$0.13 million) and rum (\$0.04 million).

Other categories such as vodka and gin remain negligible, while wine exports

are minimal, keeping overall trade at a low base.

At present, alcoholic beverages in New Zealand are subject primarily to excise duties, typically applied either per litre of product in the case of wine, or per litre of alcohol in the case of spirits.

"Import tariffs are already low, but the FTA is expected to provide duty-free access and greater certainty, while domestic taxes and regulatory requirements will continue to apply," Iyer said.

FROM THE WORLD

PAKISTAN

Grenade attack hurts 5 workers

Five labourers from Pakistan's Punjab sustained injuries in a grenade attack in the restive Balochistan province, police said on Tuesday. The incident occurred on Monday night in Chagai district. A senior police official said that masked men on two motorcycles threw at least two grenades at a house where labourers were living. Five of them were injured in the grenade attack, Station House Officer (SHO) Faiz Baksh Malli said. "The injured are all labourers from Punjab who were working on a project on a daily wage and have been moved to the hospital," he added. Meanwhile, in the Chaman border area, security sources said there had been "unprovoked" firing from across the border, and they responded strongly to repulse the attack.

SYRIA

Journalist held in Damascus

A German journalist who went missing in Syria more than three months ago is likely detained in a prison in Damascus, a lawyer for her said Tuesday, as international calls and pressure for her release mounted. "We assume that her health is very, very poor and we demand her immediate release," said Frank Jasenski, the lawyer representing Eva Maria Michelmann and her family in Germany. Michelmann, 36, was last seen on Jan. 18, when she and a Kurdish-Turkish colleague were supposedly detained by Syrian government forces during the takeover of Raqqa amid military operations against the Syrian Democratic Forces, the Committee to Protect Journalists, or CPJ, said. Michelmann, who is originally from the western German city of Cologne, had been reporting from Syria since 2022. Recently, her family in Germany had no information.

India calls for safe passage through Strait of Hormuz

YOSHITA SINGH
United Nations

Amid the West Asia crisis, India has urged restoration of safe and unimpeded maritime passage through the Strait of Hormuz at the earliest while expressing concern about safety of its seafarers, stressing that any "purported closure" of vital waterways has direct consequences for the global economy.

Addressing the UN Security Council (UNSC) open debate on 'The Safety and Protection of Waterways in the Maritime Domain' on Monday, Charge d'Affaires at the Permanent Mission of India to the UN, Ambassador Yojna Patel, stressed that India sees maritime security and the protection of waterways as essential to global security and economic prosperity.

"As a major trading nation, India strongly deprecates the recent targeting of commercial shipping through the Strait of Hormuz and the endangerment of innocent civilian crew members. Such actions have resulted in the tragic loss of precious lives of Indian seafarers and are unacceptable," Patel said during the debate held under the Council Presidency of Bahrain. India reiterated that freedom of navigation and global commerce through the Strait of Hormuz must be fully respected in accordance with international law and urged that safe and unimpeded maritime passage be restored at the earliest. India



is among the top three seafarer-supplying nations, contributing approximately 13 per cent of the global seafaring workforce.

"India remains deeply concerned about the safety and welfare of its seafarers. Any disruption, obstruction or purported closure of vital waterways has direct consequences for global economy, energy and humanitarian supply chains," Patel said. She added that India has submitted recommendations to alleviate the situation and contribute to the safety of waterways and seafarers, including a 24/7 helpline set up by the country's Directorate General of Shipping for seafarers, irrespective of nationality, which as on date, has received close to 7500 calls and more than 15,000 emails.

Amid the West Asia conflict, the Ministry of External Affairs said last month that eight Indian nationals have

lost their lives while one remained missing in "various incidents" in the region.

India emphasised that the main concerns to be immediately addressed are the safety of navigation, continuance of supply chains with specific emphasis on humanitarian supply chains, enhancement of maritime situational awareness and facilitating communication for seafarers, whether directly or indirectly. Patel noted that India has submitted recommendations to alleviate the situation and contribute to the safety of waterways and seafarers, including a 24/7 helpline set up by the country's Directorate General of Shipping for seafarers, irrespective of nationality, which as on date, has received close to 7500 calls and more than 15,000 emails.

As the Strait of Hormuz, the crucial oil artery located between Oman and Iran connecting the Persian Gulf with

the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea, is virtually closed due to the conflict, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said in his address at the debate that the safety of the world's waterways has become a test of the international order itself.

He noted with concern that since early March, the disruption of shipping through the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints, has struck at global energy security, food supplies, and trade.

He also pointed out that more than 20,000 seafarers remain stranded at sea and over 2,000 commercial vessels are caught in a web of risks and restrictions to navigation. "These men and women are not parties to any conflict. They are civilian workers keeping the world supplied. Their safety, their well-being, and their rights must be protected - at all times, and in all waters," Guterres said.

In an appeal to the parties in the conflict, Guterres called for the Strait to be opened. "Let ships pass. No tolls. No discrimination. Let trade resume. Let the global economy breathe."

Citing the example of the Black Sea Initiative amid the Ukraine war, Guterres said the deal showed that even amid conflict, practical cooperation can reopen a blocked corridor - and keep ships and essential products moving. (PTI)



President Donald Trump and Melania greeting Britain's King Charles III and Queen Camilla in Washington

UK counter-terror police probe arson attack near Jewish Centre

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

The UK's counter-terror officers are investigating a suspected arson attack at a memorial wall near a Jewish Centre in north London, the Metropolitan Police said on Tuesday.

The force said it had received reports of a fire on Monday evening and while it is not being treated as a terrorist incident, officers are "keeping an open mind" about the motive behind the attack.

The memorial wall at Limes Avenue in Golders Green, which depicts Iranians killed protesting against the country's regime, was not damaged.

"We recognise that this incident will heighten concerns in the Golders Green area, where residents have already faced a series of



attacks," said Detective Chief Superintendent Luke Williams, who leads the Met's policing in north-west London.

"We are working closely with community organisations and leaders, and want to reassure them that our protective security operation continues.

Our local officers are working closely with Counter Terror Policing to support their investigation," he said. The incident comes after four people

have been charged over a suspected arson attack last month on ambulances run by a Jewish charity. "Since last month's attack in Golders Green, we have stepped up our work to reassure communities. This includes armed police patrols as well as deployments of officers from Project Servator, who are specially trained to spot anyone who may be planning or preparing to commit criminal acts," added Williams.

A group calling itself Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia, the Islamic Movement of the Companions of the Right, has claimed responsibility for a series of arson attacks on Jewish sites in north London, as well as an incident in which drones were flown near the Israeli Embassy in the UK capital. (PTI)

Ukraine downs record 33,000 Russian drones

HANNA ARHIROVA
Kyiv

Ukraine used interceptor systems to shoot down more than 33,000 Russian drones of various types in March, a record monthly figure since Moscow launched its all-out invasion more than four years ago, Ukraine's defence minister claimed.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's domestically developed long-range attack drones struck a Russian oil refinery and terminal on the Black Sea for the third time in less than two weeks, prompting the evacuation of local people as a precautionary measure.

Ukraine has developed cutting-edge and battle-tested drone technology that has proved essential in



holding back Russia's bigger army and has drawn military interest from around the world. Interceptor drones as part of a comprehensive air defence system are now being sought by West Asia and Gulf countries amid the Iran war, according to Ukrainian officials.

Ukraine is scaling up supplies of interceptor drones to thwart Russian aerial attacks,

and its military has introduced a new command within the air force to boost the country's capabilities, Defence Minister Mykhailo Fedorov said in a post on Telegram late on Monday.

Ukraine's offensive capabilities have also improved, with the Defence Ministry saying Tuesday that the country's forces have more than doubled the range of their deep-strike capabilities since Russia's February 2022 invasion.

At that time, Ukrainian forces were able to hit military targets about 630 kilometres (400 miles) away, it said. They are now striking targets as far as roughly 1,750 kilometres (1,100 miles) behind enemy lines, the ministry said in a statement. (AP)

IOS SAGAR sends strong message of collective commitment, says Indian envoy to Singapore

GURDIP SINGH
Singapore

The coming together of 16 like-minded maritime countries for a "shared purpose" through Indian Ocean Ship SAGAR sends a strong message of "collective commitment" from our partners, the Indian envoy to Singapore said.

The IOS SAGAR, a unique operational initiative by the Indian Navy under the theme of 'One Ocean, One Mission' with 38 international crew members from 16 friendly countries, is visiting South East Asia for collaborative maritime security for peace and stability in coastal regions and the high seas.



"The IOS SAGAR is a practical and operational expression of vision MAHASAGAR, and it brings together partner nations on a shared platform for training, collaboration, and collective readiness,"

the High Commissioner of India to Singapore, Dr Shilpak Ambule, has said in welcoming the ship and guests at a special reception held on board the vessel on Monday evening.

"Despite the prevalent complex maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific region, the coming together of 16 like-minded maritime countries for a shared purpose and collective commitment through IOS SAGAR sends a strong message of shared purpose and collective commitment from our partners in this initiative towards ensuring a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific," he said. India's maritime outlook

has been shaped by the Neighbourhood First approach and Vision MAHASAGAR - Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions, he added.

Shilpak highlighted the evolving maritime landscape, which is marked by increasing contestation. "In such a scenario, addressing maritime challenges like Illegal, Unregulated and Unreported (IUU) Fishing, piracy and armed robbery at sea, narco and human trafficking, and emerging competition over critical resources requires collaborative approaches to ensure a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific region," he said. (PTI)

Croatia, Bosnia sign pipeline deal to reduce dependency on Russia

DARKO BANDIC
Dubrovnik

Croatia and Bosnia signed an agreement Tuesday to build a gas pipeline designed to reduce energy dependency on Russia in the volatile Balkans region.

The Southern Interconnection pipeline will link Bosnia with Croatia's gas network and the liquefied natural gas terminal on the Adriatic Sea island of Krk.

Bosnia has designated a US-based company, AAFS Infrastructure and Energy, as the project's investor and developer.

Croatian Prime Minister Andrej Plenkovic and the chair of Bosnia's Council of Ministers, Borjana Kristo, signed the deal in the presence of US Secretary of Energy Chris Wright on the sidelines of a summit of the countries of the Baltic, Black and Adriatic regions.

Plenkovic on social media said the gas pipeline would help diversify supplies: "We are strengthening energy security and independence... which is especially important in



Croatia PM Andrej Plenkovic at the Three Seas Initiative summit in Dubrovnik, Croatia

these challenging global circumstances," Kristo called it "a big day for both countries".

Bosnia currently imports practically all of its gas from Russia via pipelines running through neighbouring Serbia and through Bulgaria along the Turk Stream route. The new gas pipeline investment could reach up to \$1.5 billion, local media have reported. (PTI)

9-year-old boy killed by Israeli fire

ASSOCIATED PRESS
Dubai

A 9-year-old boy was killed on Tuesday by Israeli fire in southern Gaza, Nasser Hospital said.

The hospital said Adel al-Najjar was collecting firewood in a roundabout in Khan Younis city when Israeli forces shot him about 400 meters (1,312 feet) west of the Yellow Line separating Israeli-controlled areas from the rest of Gaza.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment.

An Associated Press video shows two of the boy's siblings crying over him on a stretcher at the hospital's morgue. One knelt on his body and kissed his cheeks. "What is the guilt of those



children," a woman said during the boy's funeral. "God is plaguing you, Israel."

The boy's younger brother was killed a month ago, also while collecting firewood in Khan Younis, according to hospital records.

Since a ceasefire agree-

ment went into effect in October, Israeli airstrikes and troops firing on Palestinians near military-held zones have killed at least 818 Palestinians, including at least 226 children and 179 women, according to Gaza health officials

Socialists, right-wingers seek Romanian PM ouster

STEPHEN MCGRATH/
VADIM GHIRDA
Bucharest

Romania's leftist Social Democratic Party and the hard-right Alliance for the Unity of Romanians jointly submitted a no-confidence motion on Tuesday as the two political parties seek to topple liberal Prime Minister Ilie Bolojan.

The PSD, Romania's largest political party that was until last week part of the coalition government, and the opposition AUR party, submitted the motion to Parliament, a day after the two parties announced the joint effort to bring down Bolojan, who is from the centre-right National Liberal Party, or PNL, less than a year after his pro-European coalition was sworn in.

The PSD said in a statement that it had secured enough support for the motion against Bolojan. AUR leader George Simion told a news conference Tuesday that the motion had 251 signatures and vowed that it will pass "without any problems."

The no-confidence motion will likely be voted in parliament next week.

The development follows PSD's withdrawal last week from the coalition, which left Bolojan without a parliamentary majority and plunged the European Union country into a fresh political crisis.

Romania has faced a long period of instability after a presidential election was



Prime Minister Ilie Bolojan

annulled in December 2024, and it is currently grappling with one of the highest budget deficits in the EU, rampant inflation and a technical recession.

Sorin Grindeanu, the president of PSD, said Monday that "there are many things that divide us ... but there is a common goal, that of voting for this motion and toppling the Bolojan government."

"I want to be very clear, it is a parliamentary initiative, it is an initiative that currently has support beyond political colour," Grindeanu said, adding that the motion was supported by the far-right nationalist SOS Romania party, and other right-wing groups. When the governing coalition was voted in last June, it pledged to make reducing the budget deficit a top priority.

The PSD has often found itself at loggerheads with Bolojan over some of the austerity measures, which have included tax hikes, public sector wage and pension freezes and cutting public spending and public administration jobs. (AP)

Oxford strikes new malaria vaccine pact with Serum Institute of India

ADITI KHANNA
London

The University of Oxford and Serum Institute of India (SII) have hit a significant milestone in the global fight against malaria with a pact to develop a new multi-stage vaccine. Oxford University Innovation (OUI) and the world's largest vaccine manufacturer by volume announced a licence agreement this week to support the development and manufacture of R78C.

This builds on their previous collaboration on malaria vaccines to improve outcomes. "This agreement marks an important mile-



stone in our efforts to develop a highly effective multi-stage malaria vaccine," said Simon Draper, Professor of Vaccinology and Translational Medicine in the Department of Paediatrics at Oxford University. "By combining multiple antigens that

target different stages of the parasite lifecycle, we aim to achieve stronger and longer-lasting protection.

"Our collaboration with the Serum Institute of India is central to ensuring that, if successful, these vaccines can be manufactured at scale

and made accessible to populations most in need," he said. R78C is based on two Plasmodium falciparum blood-stage antigens - RIPR and CYPRA - for use in clinical settings.

The university said the new licence pact will enable SII to support the continued development, large-scale manufacture, and potential future commercialisation of the multi-stage vaccine candidate, helping to accelerate its progression into clinical evaluation. "Malaria prevention continues to demand sustained scientific innovation, especially as efforts move towards vaccines that can target the parasite at dif-

ferent stages of its lifecycle," said SII Executive Director Dr Umesh Shaligram. "At SII, we have consistently focused on advancing such approaches with the aim of making them effective and accessible. This agreement with the University of Oxford to develop R78C builds on our ongoing collaboration and supports the continued development of next-generation malaria vaccine candidates," he said.

The leading UK university said its collaboration with SII, a Cyrus Poonawalla group company, has consistently focused on enabling equitable access to vaccines for

low and middle-income countries. The partnership aims to ensure that successful malaria vaccine candidates can be produced at scale and supplied affordably to endemic regions, by leveraging the Indian vaccine manufacturer's global manufacturing capabilities.

Dr Matthew Carpenter, OUI's Deputy Head of Licensing and Ventures for Life Sciences, added: "This licensing agreement represents an important milestone in the development of a multi-stage malaria vaccine, enabling the integration of the R78C candidate alongside existing components. (PTI)

Train collision in Indonesia kills 14; 84 injured

EDNA TARIGAN/ACHMAD IBRAHIM
■ Bekasi

Rescuers finished removing victims from a damaged commuter train car on Tuesday, confirming that the crash outside Indonesia's capital killed 14 people, all of whom were women.

The crash occurred on Monday when a long-distance train crashed into the rear car of the stopped commuter train at Bekasi Timur Station outside Jakarta.

The car was one designated for women only, a common accommodation to stop harassment.

A total of 84 injured people were taken to hospitals for treatment, said Bobby Rasyidin, CEO of state-owned



Passengers are being rescued after a train collision in Bekasi



Rescuers carrying the body of a victim of a train collision in Bekasi AP

railway company PT Kereta Api Indonesia. The bodies of the dead were taken to a hospital for further identification. Rescue teams com-

pleted the evacuation of all victims from inside the wreckage about midmorning. "There are no further casualties," said Mohammad

Syafii, the head of the National Search and Rescue Agency. All 240 passengers on the Argo Bromo Anggrek long-distance train were safe,

officials said. Police were investigating the cause of the accident, Jakarta Police Chief Asep Edi Suheri told reporters at the scene. The

Indonesian Ministry of Transportation said in a written statement that authorities believe the incident began when another commuter train collided with a stalled taxi near Bekasi Timur Station. That led staff to stop a second commuter train at the station, where it was struck by a long-distance commuter train.

"As for the chronology of events, we are leaving it to the National Transportation Safety Committee to investigate the cause of tonight's train accident in greater detail," Rasyidin said.

Accidents are common on Indonesia's aging railroad network. In January 2024, two trains collided in West Java province, killing at least four people. (AP)

Imran Khan treated for eye ailment, sent back to prison



SAJJAD HUSSAIN
■ Islamabad

Pakistan's incarcerated former prime minister Imran Khan was treated at a local hospital for his right eye ailment and then shifted back to prison on Tuesday. Khan, 74, was diagnosed with right central retinal vein occlusion (CRVO) in late January and brought to the Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (Pims), where he was given an anti-VEGF injection, a treatment being repeated every month. He was last treated on March 23. According to the Pims spokesperson, Khan was brought to the hospital on April 28 for follow-up eye treatment, during which he received a fourth intravitreal injection. Khan was shifted back to prison after the procedure. "Prior to the procedure, he was examined

by the ophthalmologists and was found to be clinically stable," he said, adding that Imran's "optical coherence tomography was performed, which showed clinical improvement". Khan was injected with a fourth dose of intravitreal injection under the guidance of microscopy by the surgeons, he added. "During the course of his stay, Khan remained vitally stable before, during and after the procedure and was discharged along with instructions for further care and follow-up advice and documents," he said. Khan's family and party have demanded that he should be moved to a private hospital and given treatment in the presence of family members. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Gohar Ali Khan in a post on X confirmed Khan's medical check-up. (PTI)

UK PM Starmer faces more pressure over Mandelson appointment

JILL LAWLESS ■ London

UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer's former chief of staff said Tuesday that he made a "serious mistake" by recommending Peter Mandelson to the United States, but denied interfering with the appointment process.

Morgan McSweeney told lawmakers on the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee that it had been "a serious error of judgment" to back Mandelson.

The committee is investigating how Mandelson, a scandal-tainted friend of Jeffrey Epstein, was given the key diplomatic job despite failing security checks. McSweeney said that "the prime minister relied on my advice, and I got it wrong." He apologised to Epstein's victims, saying, "I am sorry for any part this controversy has played in causing further hurt or distress."

McSweeney's testimony came as Starmer faced more heat Tuesday over the appointment, with lawmakers set to vote on whether the UK leader should be investigated by a parliamentary standards watchdog over the ill-fated decision.

The testimony came before the whole House of Commons debates a demand by the opposition Conservative Party for Parliament's Privileges Committee to investigate



Morgan McSweeney

Starmer's explanations of how Mandelson came to be appointed.

Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch said that Starmer had "misled the House of Commons repeatedly" when he said that "full due process" was followed over Mandelson's appointment.

A finding by the committee that Starmer misled Parliament would likely be a resigning offence. Even if lawmakers don't back the call for an inquiry, it's a potentially dangerous day for Starmer, who has spent weeks fending off calls to resign over the Mandelson saga. Starmer fired Mandelson in September after new details emerged about the ambassador's friendship with Epstein, a convicted sex offender who died in prison in 2019. Police opened an investigation into Mandelson in February over allegations that he passed on sensitive Government information to Epstein when he was a member of the UK Government in 2009. (AP)

Gunman opens fire at 2 locations in Greece

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Athens

Police in Greece's capital were searching for a gunman, reportedly aged 89, who opened fire on Tuesday in a social security office and a courthouse in central Athens, wounding at least four people.

Armed with a shotgun, the gunman initially opened fire at the social security office, wounding an employee, police said. Police officers who arrived at the scene treated the man, but the gunman fled the scene.

Local media aired security camera footage that it said was from a local store



near the social security office, which showed a man walking calmly across the street carrying what appears to be a short-barreled shotgun in his right hand.

The same man was suspected of later opening fire on the ground floor of a court building in another

part of central Athens, with several people wounded there, police said, adding that authorities had found the shotgun.

Television footage showed ambulance crews transporting at least three people from the courthouse to waiting ambulances.

The head of the Athens

Judicial Employees Union, Stratis Dounias, said that initial information indicated that the man had shot at the floor inside one of the offices in the court building.

At least three female court employees were slightly wounded by ricocheting shotgun pellets, while media reports said that a fourth female employee was transported to a hospital without physical injuries.

The motive for the shooting was unclear. State broadcaster ERT said that the gunman had reportedly left envelopes with documents after the shooting at the courthouse, saying those were the reasons for his actions.

Heavy flooding in southern China

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ Beijing

Heavy flooding from torrential rain left cars submerged and forced the evacuation of more than 200 residents in a southern Chinese city, state media reported on Tuesday.

Rescue crews deployed inflatable boats to help relocate some residents trapped in their homes in Qinzhou city in the Guangxi region, official news agency Xinhua reported. Video footage from Xinhua showed rescuers wading through chest-high water and firefighters carrying elderly residents in their arms. Qinzhou authorities said the city's meteorological station recorded rainfall



Stranded residents are evacuated on a boat after flooding from heavy rainfall in Qinzhou in southern China

of over 270 millimetres (about 10 inches) during a 24-hour period ending at 8 am on Monday.

That was the highest amount recorded there on a single day in April. The authorities quoted meteo-

logical analyst Lin Nan in a WeChat post saying that such intense rainfall in South China's coastal regions typically occurs only after the arrival of the summer monsoon in mid to late May.

AHC backs Rini Sampath in Washington DC mayoral poll



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
■ Washington

The American Hindu Coalition (AHC) has extended support for Rini Sampath, a Tamil Nadu-born cybersecurity expert, who is contesting the Washington DC mayoral elections.

The AHC organised a meeting of well-wishers at the "ISKCON of DC" temple here in support of Sampath, who is contesting in the Democratic primary on June 16, on the agenda of 'Fix the Basics' and the promise of 'A new DC'.

"We are no longer just observers; we are an organised, united front ensuring that our values and our families are represented at the highest levels of local Government. Rini's candidacy is a historic first, but our unity is what will make it a lasting movement," Ankur Misra, Executive Director of AHC Maryland, said in a statement. Among those present at the reception were community leaders Srinivas Tatipamula, Laxmi Thalaniki, Mahendra Sapa, and Chitranshu Nath.

Belarus frees journalist Andrzej in prisoner swap



ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Warsaw

Prominent journalist Andrzej Poczobut has been released from jail in Belarus in a swap with Poland that also saw a total of 10 prisoners released as the authoritarian leader of Belarus seeks improved relations with the West, officials in both countries said on Tuesday. Poczobut, a correspondent for the influential Polish newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza and a leading figure among Belarus' Polish minority, was serving eight years in prison in a case condemned as politically motivated. His

arrest in 2021 drew widespread criticism from Europe, and he was later awarded the European Union's most prestigious human rights award, the Sakharov Prize. Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski described Poczobut as a symbol of the fight for freedom in Belarus but also of the effectiveness of the Polish state in leaving no one behind. The swap is the latest in a series of US-negotiated prisoner releases that have marked stronger relations between Minsk and the West during US President Donald Trump's second term.

Ousted president's wife sentenced to 4 years in South Korea

HYUNG-JIN KIM ■ Seoul

An appeals court has raised to four years the sentence for the wife of South Korea's ousted President Yoon Suk Yeol for corruption, about two months after her husband was sentenced to life in prison for rebellion.

In January, ex-first lady Kim Keon Hee was sentenced to 20 months in prison in a district court for receiving gifts including a Graff diamond necklace and a Chanel bag from the Unification Church in return for promises of political favours. However, she was acquitted of involvement in a stock price manipulation scheme before she became first lady.

Both parties appealed, and on Tuesday, the Seoul High



Court raised her jail term to four years by convicting her of receiving another Chanel bag from the church and the price rigging charge.

The presidential couple suffered a dramatic fall from grace after Yoon's martial law imposition in December

2024 led to his impeachment and eventual removal from office.

Yoon faces a slew of criminal trials related to his martial law debacle and other scandals. Investigators say Kim was not involved in Yoon's martial law enforce-

ment. The Seoul High Court said that a first lady, being closest to a president, represents the country together with her husband and has a big influence on him.

It said Kim failed to meet public expectations for her integrity and rather exploited her high-profile status to get the gifts from the Unification Church.

Both Kim and an independent counsel have one week to appeal to the Supreme Court, the country's top court. Independent counsel Min Joong-ki's team earlier requested a 15-year term; Kim's defense team has argued Min's investigation was politically driven.

Kim has been in jail since last August when the Seoul district court approved a

warrant to arrest her, citing the chance she might destroy evidence. When Yoon was in office, Kim was embroiled in a series of scandals that hurt her husband's approval rating and provided relentless political ammunition to his rivals.

On December 3, 2024, Yoon, a conservative, abruptly declared martial law and sent troops and police officers to the National Assembly, saying he aimed to eliminate "anti-state forces" and "shameless North Korea sympathizers." He has defended his action, calling it a desperate attempt to draw public support for his fight against the liberal opposition Democratic Party which obstructed his agenda. (AP)

IS militants kill 29 people in an attack on a village in Nigeria

CHINEDU ASADU/ MARK BANCHEREAU
■ Abuja

Militants with the Islamic State group attacked a village overnight in northeastern Nigeria, killing at least 29 people, authorities said Monday. It was the latest violence in Africa's most populous country that has long been battling a complex security crisis.

The attack took place late on Sunday in Guyaku, a village in the Gombe local Government area in the country's Adamawa state, according to the state governor.

The Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the attack in a message on the Telegram messaging app. Adamawa State Governor Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri denounced the attack as tragic and unac-



ceptable during a visit to the village on Monday.

Nigeria is facing myriad security challenges, especially in the north, where an insurgency has sim-

mered for more than two decades. In February, the United States sent troops to the West African nation to help advise its military on the fight against insecurity.

There are two major IS-backed militant groups in Nigeria but it wasn't immediately clear which one was behind the attack in Guyaku.

The Islamic State West Africa Province, or ISWAP, is known to be operating in the northeast, including in Adamawa state, while another IS-linked group known locally as Lakurawa often attacks villages further away in the north-central states of Sokoto and Kebbi.

The Guyaku attack occurred on the same day that gunmen raided an orphanage in north-central Nigeria and abducted 23 pupils. Fifteen were later rescued and the Government said "intensive operations" were underway to "secure the safe return of the remaining eight victims and apprehend the perpetrators."

Students' kidnappings have come to define the insecurity in Nigeria, where analysts say armed gangs see schools and students as "strategic" targets to draw attention. The attack took place in an "isolated area" of Lokoja, capital of Kogi State, according to a statement by the state's commissioner, Kingsley Femi Fanwo.

The facility, Dahallukitab Group of Schools, was operating illegally, he said. No group immediately claimed responsibility for the attack in a region that has seen an increase in kidnappings for ransom.

The statement did not say how old the abducted children are, but the term "pupil" in Nigeria usually refers to someone in kindergarten or primary school, covering ages up to 12. (AP)

Uganda detains 231 foreigners over trafficking probe

ASSOCIATED PRESS
■ Kampala (Uganda)

Ugandan authorities said on Tuesday that they have detained dozens of foreigners, including Indians and Pakistanis, in a crackdown on illegal migration that the internal affairs ministry suggested was linked to human traffickers and cyberscam operations. At least 231 people have been detained since Monday in operations that targeted a group of Nigerians living in the country's north, as well as another group of foreigners living together in a closed compound in Kampala, the Capital.

The second group included people from Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Ghana, Myanmar, Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and Malaysia, all of whom were staying in "a highly restricted, self-contained apartment complex equipped with its own restaurant and internal facilities designed to restrict movement," according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Thirty-six of the 169 people found in the compound were women. Authorities say they acted on intelligence showing large groups of foreigners living or working in Uganda without the necessary papers to do so. Many didn't have passports, the ministry said in a statement.

"Some individuals have claimed they were trafficked into Uganda with promises of employment," the statement said. "Others were engaged in cyber-scramming activities. A few were found in possession



of materials suggesting involvement in other criminal activities." Those found to have broken the law face criminal prosecution, it said.

Simon Peter Mundeby, a spokesman for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, told The Associated Press that there were three categories of foreigners now held for questioning in two places: suspected victims of trafficking, alleged perpetrators, and those who simply overstayed their visas but did not engage in criminal activities.

The trafficking victims and the overstayers would be helped to leave Uganda after buying their own tickets, he said, while those authorities identified as suspected ring-leaders of trafficking will be charged and could eventually face deportation. Uganda has a reputation for welcoming foreigners, hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing violent conflict in neighbouring countries such as Congo, Burundi and South Sudan. For short visits, entry visas are not required for people from many countries in Africa and elsewhere.



PROSPECT

Delhi-Jalandhar City Intercity Express short terminated at Ludhiana



Northern Railways said that due to operational reasons, train no. 14681 Delhi Jn. - Jalandhar City Intercity Express commencing on April 28 was short-terminated at Ludhiana Jn. Similarly, train no. 14682 Jalandhar City - Delhi Jn. journey commencing on April 29 will short-originate from Ludhiana Jn. In a press release Northern Railways said, "Due to operational reasons, the train no-14681 Delhi Jn. - Jalandhar City JCO 28.04.26 shall be short-terminated at Ludhiana Jn. and train no- 14682 Jalandhar City - Delhi Jn. JCO- 29.04.26 shall short-originate from Ludhiana Jn."

NSE welcomes CERC nod for market coupling in power sector

The National Stock Exchange of India Limited (NSE) has welcomed the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission's (CERC) notification of 17 April 2026 on the Power Market (Draft Second Amendment) Regulations, 2026, paving the way for market coupling. Under the proposed amendment, Grid India will—with the Commission's approval—formulate the Power Market Coupling Procedure within six months.

NSE described market coupling as a significant reform that will boost transparency, operational efficiency, and uniform price discovery in India's power markets. Aligned with the "One Nation, One Grid, One Price" vision, it promises to deepen the market and establish a robust benchmark for participants. Once implemented, Grid India—as the Market Coupling Operator—will aggregate bids from all three spot power exchanges and set a single market-clearing price, allowing uniform trade settlements across exchanges. NSE noted that this mirrors global best practices and resembles the volume-weighted methodology used for its monthly electricity futures settlements.

Since electricity futures launched in July 2025, spot prices across exchanges have fallen by about 14 per cent, enhancing efficiency and societal surplus. NSE expects market coupling to further promote fair pricing and narrow exchange disparities. NSE MD & CEO Ashish Kumar Chauhan said: "This amendment and the consequent implementation of market coupling represent a constructive step towards greater transparency and efficiency in power markets. An expeditious rollout will yield a uniform pricing benchmark for all three spot exchanges and two financial exchanges."



ED attaches Anil Ambani's Mumbai flat, son's farmhouse

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Tuesday attached a Mumbai flat belonging to industrialist Anil Ambani and a Khandala farmhouse held jointly by his son Jai Anshul Ambani under a ₹3,034 crore worth attachment in a bank fraud-linked money laundering probe against Reliance Communications. The provisional attachment under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) has been made to prevent dissipation of assets and to protect the interests of banks and the public, the Enforcement Directorate said in a statement.

The money laundering case stems from a clutch of CBI FIRs registered on the basis of the complaints of State Bank of India, Punjab National Bank, Bank of Baroda and Life Insurance Corporation of India against RCOM, Anil Ambani and others. RCOM and its group companies availed loans



from domestic and foreign lenders, of which, a total amount of ₹40,185 crore is outstanding, according to the ED.

The central agency said a flat in Usha Kiran Building at Cumballa Hill in South Mumbai belonging to Anil Ambani, a farmhouse in Pune's hill station of Khandala held in the name of Anil Ambani's son Jai Anshul Ambani and Luna Trust, and a land parcel in Ahmedabad's Sanand area in the name of Mudra Foundation for Communications Research and Education (MICA) have been attached.

The attachment also includes 7.71 crore shares of Reliance Infrastructure Ltd, held by RiseE Infinity," a group entity of Anil Ambani under the RiseE Trust umbrella. The ED said this was a private family Trust of Anil Ambani.

It stated that the RiseE Trust was established to "ensure" wealth preservation and resource generation by aggregating properties within the Trust and shielding it from the personal liabilities of Anil Ambani in the form of personal guarantees extended by him to lender banks against the loans sanctioned to RCOM. "The properties were intended to be beneficially used and owned by the Anil Ambani family and not for the distressed public banks whose loans turned NPA," it said.

The ED said it committed to restoring the allegedly defrauded assets in this case to the victims, which are the lender banks and financial institutions. Such a provision is available under Section 8 of

the PMLA and it is called restitution of assets. With the latest action, the total attachment of properties in the cases against the Reliance Anil Ambani Group stands at ₹19,344 crore. The Group is being investigated by the ED on charges of bank fraud and diversion of funds.

Meanwhile, a RAAG spokesperson reacted to the development, saying some of the attached properties belong to Kokilaben D. Ambani, Anil Ambani's mother.

He added that the Usha Kiran and Khandala properties were "legacy family assets" acquired about four decades ago. "MICA is an AICTE recognised charitable educational institution that has operated independently since 1991. The shareholding of RiseE Infinity Pvt Ltd has been publicly disclosed on the stock exchange since 2021," the spokesperson said, adding that they will challenge ED's provisional attachment before the Adjudicating Authority.

Modular knee replacement redefines orthopaedic surgery

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

Knee replacement surgery is undergoing a significant transformation, with modern orthopaedics moving away from the traditional "one procedure fits all" approach towards more precise and personalised treatments.

The emerging "Ala Carte" or modular knee replacement technique is at the forefront of this shift, allowing surgeons to tailor procedures according to the patient's specific condition.

Unlike conventional total knee replacement (TKR), where the entire joint is replaced, the modular approach focuses on treating only the damaged portion of the knee. "The modular or

'Ala Carte' technique allows us to preserve the natural structure of the knee while addressing only the affected area. This leads to more natural movement and better functional outcomes for patients," said Dr (Prof.) Puneet Mishra, Director, Orthopaedics, Fortis Hospital.

The approach enables partial or combined compartment replacement depending on the extent of the disease, thereby maintaining healthy bone and ligaments. Compared to total knee replacement, modular procedures offer several advantages, including faster recovery, reduced pain and blood loss, improved mobility, and a more natural feel of the knee.

India-Africa ties 'rooted in centuries of civilizational linkages': MoS Margherita

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
New Delhi

The Yuva Bharat Global Forum, organised by the Chakbal Group, was held at Bharat Mandapam, bringing together distinguished ambassadors, senior officials, representatives from think tanks, business chambers, and members of the media. Addressing the gathering, Minister of State for External Affairs, Pabitra Margherita, underlined that India-Africa relations are entering a transformative and decisive phase, anchored in shared history and future-oriented collaboration.

He stated that India-Africa ties are "rooted in centuries of civilizational linkages, strengthened through trade, cultural exchange, and a shared struggle against colonialism." He further added that the continent remains "central to India's global engagement, guided by the principles of equality, mutual respect, and shared growth." He further highlighted that the vision of 'Viksit Bharat @2047'



MoS for External Affairs, Pabitra Margherita, addressing Yuva Bharat Global Forum on India-Africa Youth Connect, organised by Chakbal Group, at Bharat Mandapam on Tuesday

aligns closely with Africa's 'Agenda 2063', as both focus on inclusive and sustainable development.

The Minister underscored that India's development partnership with Africa prioritises "capacity building, employment generation, technology transfer, digital empowerment, and climate collaboration," adding that "this is a partnership based not on extraction, but on empow-

erment." Highlighting India's developmental initiatives, he noted that programmes such as ITEC and ICCR scholarships have contributed significantly to building human capital, while India's diplomatic outreach has expanded with 17 new missions across Africa, taking the total to 46. He also acknowledged the role of the three-million-strong Indian diaspora across Africa, describing it as a vital bridge that continues to strengthen economic and cultural ties.

The Minister noted that collaboration in defence, security, and maritime domains is gaining momentum, guided by the Vision MAHASAGAR, aimed at ensuring stability and security in the Indian Ocean region. Commending the Chakbal Group, he stated that platforms like Yuva Bharat Global Forum play an important role in fostering dialogue and strengthening partnerships, at a time when India-Africa engagement is evolving towards more dynamic framework.

DAILY SUDOKU

DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★★★★

HOW TO SOLVE IT

Sudoku is a logic puzzle where you fill a 9x9 grid so that numbers 1 to 9 appear once in every row, column, and 3x3 box, using elimination and logical deduction—no maths involved.



SOLUTION (28.04.26)

9	5	3	1	8	6	2	7	4
4	8	2	9	7	5	6	1	3
7	6	1	3	4	2	5	8	9
1	2	8	6	9	4	3	5	7
5	9	7	8	2	3	4	6	1
6	3	4	5	1	7	9	2	8
2	4	9	7	5	8	1	3	6
8	1	6	2	3	9	7	4	5
3	7	5	4	6	1	8	9	2

DOUBLE CROSSWORD WEDNESDAY | APRIL 29, 2026

ACROSS

- Sit in the upper chamber (5)
- Tragic end for a vehicle in Ireland (5)
- Slowly emerged as being nothing other than a fuddled doze (5)
- It's different for some of the British (3)
- What one's pet beggar may do? (3,2)
- Talk with a noted teetotaler during tea (7)
- One takes steps to destroy them (5)
- Less than amiable little girl? (3)
- Such orders can be sent to pals (6)
- A bloomer most companions would find disturbing? (7)
- A two bank town in Scotland? (4)
- In Sussex, as you can see, it's a stream (4)

DOWN

- Wash an article for a bachelor (5)
- He's in at No. 11 (4,3)
- He can see himself in the mirror (4)
- One cut out to make an entry, perhaps (5)
- Optimistically expects to jump two ways (5)
- Is she a match for Lucifer? (5)
- In aviation, it indicates a point along the route (3)
- A poster designed for a coastal place (7)
- I'm after a historic model of car for him (3)
- Look for a star to the East (5)

- Snappy new title for BR? (7)
- A growing reason for MOT failure? (6)
- As musical entertainment, one might knock it (3)
- To do with a contest (5)
- Most of the team having their mothers round (7)
- The odd street light out of place? (5)
- Keep complaining to the central manager (3)
- Steady reversal is possible (5)
- Race that can go to an American's head (5)
- Meaning to go north in the southeast again! (5)
- Go furtively breaking links (5)
- Show left to one man! (7)
- Opera reduced to scale (5)
- City in America, ironically! (5)
- Plants able to grow much higher than others (7)
- Vessel to let loose at Beachy Head (6)
- Thanks for the kiss, but it's money that's wanted (3)
- Baby can wander round England's capital - a good place! (5)
- Tricks a raw beginner plays (5)
- The school play? (5)
- Many a mug means a great deal! (4)
- Spoil a horse, docking its tail (3)

SOLUTION (28.04.26)

- | | | | |
|----------------|--------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1. G-loss | 20. Lo-iter | DOWN | 16. Dolls |
| 6. Might | 22. Cell | 2. Latisch | 18. (doch-an) Doris |
| 9. C-apt-ain | 24. Ear | 3. Scarab | 19. Helical |
| 10. Steam | 25. Pirates | 4. Sam (rev.) | 21. Oarfish |
| 11. Score (20) | 26. Midas | 5. Stars | 22. Capote |
| 12. P-rise | 27. Mimic | 6. Mission | 23. Le-Gi-on |
| 13. E-states | 28. Robin | 7. Ince | 25. Pa-NS-y |
| 15. Red | 29. Law-suit | 8. Harden | 26. (the)Mill |
| 17. Ah-AB | 30. CH-ill | 12. Peter | 28. Rip |
| 18. Domino | 31. Penny | 13. Eagle | |
| 19. Heron | | 14. Tapir | |
| | | 15. Rivet | |

VIT Engineering Entrance Examination 2026 commences at VIT-AP University, Amaravati

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE
Amaravati

The Vellore Institute of Technology Engineering Entrance Examination (VITEEE) 2026 commenced on Tuesday at VIT-AP University, Amaravati, marking the beginning of one of India's most sought-after engineering entrance examinations. Conducted in a computer-based format, VITEEE serves as the gateway for admission to B.Tech programmes offered at VIT campuses in Vellore, Chennai, Amaravati, and Bhopal.

Addressing on the occasion, Dr P Arulmozhivarman, Vice-Chancellor of VIT-AP University, stated that the examination will be conducted across multiple centers nationwide until May 3. He highlighted that candidates from 129 cities across 212 centers in India, along with participants from 9 international locations—Singapore, Qatar, Muscat, Dubai, Kuwait, and Al Manamah, Abu Dhabi, Malaysia, Sharjah—are appearing for the examination this year. The results are expected to be announced in second week of May, and candidates can access updates on the official website: <https://vit.ac.in/>

Dr Jagadish Chandra, Registrar, informed that alongside VITEEE, other entrance examinations are also being conducted as per the following schedule:



Students queue up at the VIT-AP University campus to appear for the VITEEE 2026 entrance examination today

- VITEEE 2026: April 28, to May 3
 - Research / M. Tech / Law / MBA: April 28 and May 3
- VITEEE continues to attract a large number of aspirants each year, reflecting its reputation for academic excellence and its commitment to nurturing future-ready engineers, he said. To ensure a smooth and hassle-free experience for candidates, VIT-AP University has arranged special transportation facilities from nearby cities including Vijayawada and Guntur. Providing insights into admission process, Dr John Pradeep, Deputy Director (Admissions), stated that candidates securing ranks up to 1.5 lakh will be eligible to participate in online counselling process for VIT-AP, scheduled to be held during May-June 2026.

Security forces conduct joint operation in Manipur, 3 cadres held, arms recovered

TONY DAS
Guwahati

Indian Army and Assam Rifles formations under Spear Corps, in close conjunction with Manipur Police, conducted a series of precise, intelligence-driven joint operations across Kakching, Chandel and Tengenoual Districts during the period of April 19 to 25, a press release said.

The operations led to the apprehension of 03 cadres from hill and valley-based groups and the recovery of 06 weapons, explosives and other war-like stores.

On April 19, Assam Rifles launched a joint operation with the Kakching Commando team at Kakching Lamkhai Laipham Loknung. During the operation an active cadre of the PREPAK



(Pro) was apprehended.

On April 20, based on credible intelligence Assam Rifles conducted a coordinated operation in the Tengenoual District and apprehended a PREPAK (PRO) cadre and a PLA cadre.

On April 21, Assam Rifles conducted an operation in the jungle areas of T Bongmol, Tengenoual District and recovered one rifle, one carbine, two radio sets

and four Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

On April 23, Assam Rifles and Chandel Police carried out a joint operation in the dense marshy forests near Khumkot Village in the Khengjoi Sub Division and recovered four Rifles, four Pompi, seven Bombs, three Grenades with one detonator and five radio sets.

BRIEFLY

NFL averages 13.2 m viewers on television, digital platforms



The first round of the NFL draft averaged 13.2 million viewers across television and digital platforms, according to the league and Nielsen.

It was the third-most watched first round on record, behind 2020's audience of 15.5 million and last year's 13.6 million.

The draft was televised on ESPN, NFL Network, ABC and ESPN Deportes as well as streaming on the ESPN app, Disney+, Hulu, NFL+ and YouTube.

The league also said there was record attendance of 805,000 in Pittsburgh across the three days of the draft, including a record 320,000 for Thursday's first round.

Tailgating to be allowed for Foxborough games



Tailgating will be allowed prior to World Cup games in Gillette Stadium, after all.

The Boston World Cup host committee said Monday that FIFA reversed its initial stance that no tailgating would be allowed at any of the 104 matches during the tournament, to be played in the US, Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19. Six group-stage matches will be played at the home of the NFL's New England Patriots in Foxborough, south of Boston, plus a quarterfinal on July 9.

The committee said the shift conforms with local policies that allow tailgating "like any other event hosted at the stadium as there are no venue restrictions or local public safety restrictions in place that would prohibit it."

Those events include games hosted by the Patriots and Major League Soccer's New England Revolution, and concerts.

Sabalenka avoids Madrid Open virus scare



TALES AZZONIAP ■ Madrid

Tennis players are facing an unknown opponent at the Madrid Open.

A stomach virus or food poisoning has affected Iga Swiatek, Coco Gauff, Marin Cilic and a few others, causing some concern.

World Number 1 Aryna Sabalenka avoided an upset by Naomi Osaka on the court on Monday and said she's trying to avoid illness by sticking to a simple diet of chicken breast, rice and salad. The rumor among the players was bad shrimp tacos were to blame.

Sabalenka knocked on wood and said, "So far, so good. I heard that I have to avoid those tacos (laughing). I stick to the same food, same meal that I've been having since the very beginning of the tournament."

Sabalenka said she was spending as little time as possible on site at the Caja Magica tennis complex. "I try not to stay for too long," she said. "Extra vitamin C, I guess, extra IM8, and I'm good to go, hopefully."

Gauff vomited on the court on her way to a victory over Sorana Cirstea on Sunday. The American

didn't show signs of illness on Monday in her 6-4, 1-6, 7-6 (5) loss to Linda Noskova, last year's runner-up to Sabalenka.

"I've heard there is some virus going around," six-time Grand Slam champion Swiatek said after withdrawing from her match in Madrid on Saturday. "I've been feeling terrible."

Cilic couldn't play his match against Joao Fonseca on Friday.

"Unfortunately, I got food poisoning," Cilic said. "After trying to recover all night my body is unfortunately exhausted and not at the proper level to get into the battle."

Sabalenka rebounded from a set and a break down against Osaka in their fourth round contest. She prevailed against Number 15 Osaka 6-7 (1), 6-3, 6-2 in 2 hours, 20 minutes to reach the quarterfinals and stay on track to defend her title.

"Oh my God, that was an incredible level," Sabalenka said. "She played incredible tennis. I feel like I just got lucky in a couple of shots in the third set, that's why it went that fast. I'm happy she brought that fight, I had to fight through to level up my game." Sabalenka won her 15th straight match and advanced to her 17th consecutive

quarterfinal. She hasn't lost before that round since February 2025 in Dubai. The Belarusian said her team kept pushing her to "keep fighting, keep going."

"I'm really happy that I didn't give up and I was pushing until the very last point," Sabalenka said.

Longest tiebreaker since 2024: Sabalenka will next face American Hailey Baptiste, who defeated Belinda Bencic 6-1, 6-7 (14), 6-3 after losing the second set in the longest four-level regular tiebreaker since 2024, according to the WTA.

Baptiste broke the racket on her leg in frustration after the loss in a set in which she wasted six match points, including five during the tiebreaker.

The 32nd-ranked American was able to rebound and clinch the victory in 2 hours, 42 minutes.

Rybakina's line-calling frustration: World Number 2 Elena Rybakina lost in straight sets to lucky loser

Anastasia Potapova in a Monday night match.

Rybakina said on Sunday she had no trust in the electronic line-calling system in Madrid. She complained to the chair umpire after her opponent, Zheng Qinwen, was awarded an ace in the second set. Rybakina said the mark on the court was out. The umpire refused to inspect the mark and backed the system. Rybakina eventually won in three sets on Sunday.

"Well with this thing, I won't trust it at all," Rybakina said. "Because there was no mark even close to what the TV showed." (AP)



Indian grapplers bag 4 golds at Commonwealth meet

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ New Delhi

Indian grapplers impressed at the ongoing Commonwealth Youth and Junior Weightlifting Championships and the corresponding Universal Cup (Senior) in Apia, Samoa, securing four gold medals on the second day of competition.

Sunil Singh lifted a total of 271kg (126kg in snatch and 145kg in clean and jerk) to clinch the gold in the 65kg men's category, while Aisangfa Gogoi won the top prize in women 58kg and Abhinob Gogoi bagged the yellow metal in men's 71kg division.

Aisangfa lifted a total of 185kg (79kg in snatch and 106kg in clean and jerk) to bag gold in the 58kg women's category, while Abhinob totalled 284kg (129kg in snatch and 155kg in clean and jerk) to secure top finish in the 71kg men's division.



In the Universal Cup, Arunachal Pradesh's Charu Pesi bagged the gold medal in the men's 6kg category with a total lift of 289kg (127kg in snatch and 162kg in clean and jerk).

Indian Weightlifting Federation (IWF) president Sahdev Yadav congratulated the athletes, coaches and support staff for their performances in the tournament. "These achievements reflect the hard work and commitment of our athletes and support team. India continues to rise as a strong contender on the global weightlifting stage," Yadav said in his congratulatory message.

Underwent strict testing regime: Sabastian Sawe



NEIL BARKER AND STEVE DOUGLAS ■ London

Sabastian Sawe hopes the stringent testing regime he underwent before becoming the first person to break the fabled 2-hour barrier in marathon running will prove to the world he is competing clean. The 29-year-old Kenyan pulled off the feat that was long considered unthinkable when winning the London Marathon on Sunday in a time of 1 hour, 59 minutes and 30 seconds.

There have been a slew of high-profile doping cases involving Kenyan runners in recent years, notably women's marathon world record-holder Ruth Chepng'etich getting a three-year ban in October.

So, in agreement with his coaches and management team, Sawe said he volunteered to undergo "multiple" doping tests to dispel any suspicion around his own performances, including victories at last year's marathons in Berlin and London.

"Doping has become a cancer in my country," Sawe told reporters on Monday. Sawe said he and his team decided to implement the stringent testing regime because the possibility of people looking at his results "with a lot of doubts was not good," and he wanted to "show the world that we can run clean and also run fast." The BBC,

which holds the broadcast rights for the London Marathon, reported that Adidas provided \$50,000 to the Athletics Integrity Unit, track and field's anti-doping body, to frequently test Sawe over a 12-month period, including 25 out-of-competition tests leading up to the Berlin Marathon in September and a similar number ahead of the London race.

The Athletics Integrity Unit didn't immediately respond to a request from The Associated Press for comment on Sawe's testing regime. Sawe is urging other runners to volunteer for more doping tests.

"Everyone will feel comfortable running with his fellow athlete because there will be no doubt thinking (that) someone is using what he's using," he said. "And so, it's important to run clean and to show the world (that) talent, with hard work, discipline and patience, can lead to big achievements."

Sawe also credited his footwear for helping him break the marathon record by an astonishing 65 seconds in Sunday's race. He wore an Adidas shoe that weighed less than half the weight of an average running shoe. After the race, he held up the shoe, which had his winning time written next to it.

"The shoe is very nice, very light, comfortable and so supportive," he said, "and is pushing (me) forward." Sawe was already a superstar in marathon running but has suddenly become a global sensation, something the softly spoken Kenyan is going to have to get used to.

"Being in the history books is not something easy," he said. (AP)



NBA set to give out Rookie of the Year award; Flagg, Knueppel and Edgcombe finalists

ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ New York

Dallas' Cooper Flagg and Charlotte's Kon Knueppel were Duke teammates last season. For the NBA's Rookie of the Year award, they're basically rivals.

The former Blue Devils were expected to finish first and second — in some order — for the NBA's rookie award, which will be announced shortly past 7 pm EDT on Monday. Flagg and Knueppel were first and second in rookie scoring this season, the first former college teammates to do that since UConn stars Emeka Okafor and Ben Gordon did in 2004-05.

Philadelphia's VJ Edgcombe is also a finalist for the rookie honor. "NBA ROTY announced tonight, still hoping for a tie," read a post on Duke basketball's X account on Monday. Such a finish isn't unheard of.

There have been three ties for Rookie of the Year — two of them involving Duke players, Elton Brand and Grant Hill. Brand and Steve Francis tied in 2000, Hill and Jason Kidd in 1995 and Dave Cowens and Geoff Petrie tied in 1971. The rookie award is the sixth to be announced by the NBA since the end of the regular



season. The others: — San Antonio's Victor Wembanyama was the unanimous Defensive Player of the Year.

— Oklahoma City's Shai Gilgeous-Alexander got 96 of a possible 100 first-place votes to win the Clutch Player of the Year award.

— San Antonio's Keldon Johnson won Sixth Man of the Year.

— Boston's Derrick White won the Sportsmanship Award. That award, unlike most others, is selected

solely by active players. — Atlanta's Nickeil Alexander-Walker won Most Improved Player.

Other award announcements yet to be scheduled include MVP (either Gilgeous-Alexander, Wembanyama or Denver's Nikola Jokic) and Coach of the Year (either Detroit's JB Bickerstaff, San Antonio's Mitch Johnson or Boston's Joe Mazzulla). The NBA will announce the Executive of the Year, the Twyman—Stokes Teammate of the Year and the Hustle Award winner later this week.



New York City to hold free World Cup fan events in each borough



ASSOCIATED PRESS ■ New York

New York City will hold a series of free events for soccer fans who hope to experience the excitement of the World Cup but can't afford the hefty ticket prices to the matches, officials announced Monday.

The events — one in each of the city's five boroughs — will include watch parties for the matches and other festivities.

They will be staged at Rockefeller Center in Manhattan, the Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in Queens, Brooklyn Bridge Park in Brooklyn, a shopping center near Yankee Stadium in the Bronx and a minor league baseball stadium in

Staten Island. A separate fan event planned for Sports Illustrated Stadium in Harrison, New Jersey, where the New York Red Bulls play, will cost \$10.

World Cup matches will be played at MetLife Stadium in New Jersey, where just getting to and from the matches on public transit could cost \$150.

New York Mayor Zohran Mamdani, a noted soccer devotee, announced the free events alongside New York Gov. Kathy Hochul, a fellow Democrat.

"Every fan should be able to watch the greatest tournament on earth without dipping into their savings," Mamdani said.

India take learnings despite series loss to South Africa, says Muzumdar

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA ■ Benoni

Head coach Amol Muzumdar struck a reflective note after India women's national cricket team slumped to a 1-4 defeat against South Africa women, saying the visitors would return richer in "learnings" despite the disappointing result.

India won the fourth game but ended the series with a 23-run defeat in the fifth and final T20 on Monday.

"I think it's been a fantastic series, fought really well. It was competitive right from the

start and it's been fantastic to come here in South Africa," Muzumdar said after the conclusion of the series.

"Obviously, the result hasn't gone our way. We've been a little disappointed with the 4-1 result, but we have got a lot of learnings out of the series."

The coach identified India's inability to strike in the powerplay and lapses in finishing with the bat as key areas of concern, though he noted visible improvement in the latter half of the rubber.

"Initially, in the powerplay we weren't able to pick up wickets, that was one concern area for us and also the finish with the bat. But



OBVIOUSLY, THE RESULT HASN'T GONE OUR WAY. WE'VE BEEN A LITTLE DISAPPOINTED WITH THE 4-1 RESULT, BUT WE HAVE GOT A LOT OF LEARNINGS FROM SERIES

—HEAD COACH AMOL MUZUMDAR

we addressed those things in the last three games," he said.

He lauded the opposition for coming out as strong rivals.

beautifully in this series." The opener had scores of 51, 54, 115, 18 and 92 not out in the series. Muzumdar, however, drew positives from individual performances, highlighting skipper Harmanpreet Kaur's form and work ethic.

"To start with, Harman's form has been fantastic, she's batting well and her work ethics have been spot-on," he said.

He also praised late contributions from Richa Ghosh and a return to form for Deepti Sharma. "Richa coming good in the last couple of games is a big positive for us, Deepti coming back in form in the last game."

Ferreira, Dubey hand Punjab first defeat

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Mullanpur

Donovan Ferreira's audacious stroke-play handed Punjab Kings the bitter pill of defeat for the first time in this edition of IPL as Rajasthan Royals canted home by six wickets in a high-octane chase here on Tuesday.

Chasing a target of 223, Rajasthan Royals needed 71 off the last six overs when Ferreira smashed his way to an unbeaten 52 off 26 balls in company of an unheralded Shubham Dubey (31 not out off 12 balls) to clinch the victory with four balls to spare.

Ferreira was brilliant while picking his areas as PBKS troika of Arshdeep Singh (1/68 in 4 overs), Lockie Ferguson (0/57 in 4 overs) and Marco Jansen (0/41 in 3.2 overs) would like to forget this day in a hurry.

Between Ferreira and Dubey, they hit nine fours and five sixes as they undid all the good work done by Yuzvendra Chahal (3/36 in 4 overs).

The manner in which Vaibhav Sooryavanshi (43 off 16 balls) started with a deluge of sixes — five — including a couple of flicked maximums off Arshdeep Singh and Lockie Ferguson, it seemed RR would make a meal of the chase.

Arshdeep was lucky that Sooryavanshi missed out on a



sixth six when he mistimed a full-toss only for Shreyas Iyer to grab it with ease.

However, it was the wily Chahal who brought the Royals back in the game just when Yashasvi Jaiswal (51 off 27 balls) looked like slowly taking the game away in company of Dhruv Jurel (20 off 16 balls).

However, Jurel committed a hara-kiri, offering an easy skier off a full-toss but it was the manner in which Jaiswal and skipper Riyan Parag (29 off 16 balls) were taken out deserved

more than honourable mention.

For both, the pace on the ball was considerably taken off and flighted outside the off-stump line without giving enough room to chance their arms. Both were holed out at long-off. But then, Ferreira and Dubey had other ideas as Chahal's good work went down the drain.

Earlier, Stoinis muscled his way to a 20-ball half-century despite a gallant effort from young leg-spinner Yash Raj Punja as Punjab Kings posted

a competitive 222 for 4 after being put into bat.

While Punjab's top three — Prabhshimran Singh (59 off 44 balls), Priyansh Arya (29 off 11 balls) and Cooper Connolly (30 off 14 balls) — all looked dangerous, but none of them went on to play a big knock on a track that was hard and offered appreciable bounce.

It was Stoinis, who bludgeoned his way to an unbeaten 22-ball 62 with a half a dozen of sixes and four boundaries as Royals gave away as many as 55 runs in last three

overs. Inexperienced Brijesh Sharma's (0/42 in 4 overs) pace-off play backfired with 24 coming off the final over of the innings.

Stoinis, who hasn't really been summoned this season, was all about brute power and Royals bowlers, including the dependable Jofra Archer (1/40), were guilty of bowling length balls inside his hitting arc.

However, credit should go to unheralded Yash Raj (2 for 41 in 4 overs), a 6 feet 4 inches tall leg-spinner for varying his pace, not being afraid to flight and alter the length as and when required and keeping things tight till the 16th over.

Just when Connolly was cutting loose with some delectable strokeplay, Yash Raj got the Australian against the run of play by flighting one outside the off-stump asking the batter to fetch it. The result was an easy catch for Donovan Ferreira at long-off.

Prabhshimran, despite scoring a half-century and hitting six boundaries and a six, wasn't very smooth with his timing. Yash Raj, whose average speed was in early 90s (kmph), slowed it down and enticed Prabhshimran to throw the kitchen sink without being anywhere close to the pitch of the delivery. The catch was cleanly collected by Riyan Parag.

Bad luck, hesitation behind collapse: Axar Patel

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

Skipper Axar Patel attributed Delhi Capitals' dramatic batting collapse against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the Indian Premier League to a mix of "hesitation" stemming from their previous outing and plain "bad luck".

After being blown away in a span of a few frenetic overs, Axar pointed out that the rapid loss of wickets left no batter with the time to settle, turning the contest decisively in RCB's favour.

I think because of what happened in the last game — there was some hesitation. Other than that, I think it was bad luck. No batter could really settle — we lost wickets in one or two balls," Axar said, underlining how the collapse was more circumstantial than structural.

DC had posted a commanding 264 against Punjab Kings but could not defend the total in their previous outing. After DC were left to reel at an unthinkable six for eight, the match against RCB on Monday night was as good as over. The left-arm all-rounder suggested that the psychological residue



of failing to defend in the previous match may have subconsciously impacted the batting approach.

Axar also highlighted how the nature of the pitch evolved quickly, catching the batters off guard.

While there was appreciable movement early on, the conditions eased out once the new ball

lost its sting.

"In the first over there was swing, later, once the ball got hit for a boundary, the swing reduced. But when you score 60-70, bowlers come in with that in the back of their mind," he said, admitting that the low total inevitably affected the bowlers' mindset despite their efforts.

He refused to fault the bowling unit, instead placing the onus squarely on the batting unit's failure to adapt. "The way we batted today, I would call it bad luck." Despite the heavy defeat, Axar maintained that pressure is an inherent part of the tournament's business end and not something the team can shy away from.



Mumbai Indians desperate for revival against in-form Sunrisers Hyderabad

DEVARCHIT VARMA ■ Mumbai

Mumbai Indians will hope for a massive turnaround in fortunes against an in-form Sunrisers Hyderabad, with the five-time champion's campaign at stake in a crucial Indian Premier League clash here on Wednesday.

With five defeats in the first seven matches, and their most recent being their heaviest in history by margin of runs (103 vs Chennai Super Kings), Mumbai Indians (rank 9th, 4 points, NRR -0.736) have their backs firmly pressed against the wall in a season marred by no-shows from their top guns.

Comprising as many as four players from India's T20 World Cup-winning squad, MI's woes have been compounded by ordinary returns from skipper Hardik Pandya (3 wickets and 97 runs) and Suryakumar Yadav (110).



Tilak Varma's maiden IPL hundred against Gujarat Titans did help MI snap a four-match losing streak, but their massive loss to CSK once again threw their faltering campaign in a tailspin.

MI also have had Jasprit Bumrah (2 wickets) languishing far behind. Usually preserved for breakthroughs

in middle-overs and stifling oppositions at the death, Bumrah has uncharacteristically opened the attack for MI in the last two games since the other new-ball bowlers have failed to deliver.

Neither Trent Boult (1) nor Deepak Chahar (1) have been penetrative, and



overall, MI have more often than not allowed oppositions to seize control in the powerplays with a lack of wickets and ordinary bowling.

Meanwhile, Rohit Sharma's absence created a void which Danish Malewar (2, 0) hasn't been able to fill in the last two games, and it remains to be seen

if the former skipper has regained fitness after a hamstring issue. With an injured Mitchell Santner being replaced by Keshav Maharaj, it also remains to be seen if Will Jacks finds a place in the playing XI. He had thrived in similar conditions in the T20 World Cup.

SRH, meanwhile, will feel they are primed to end a three-match losing streak against MI when they take the field in batting-friendly conditions of the Wankhede Stadium here.

Unfazed by an onslaught from the 15-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi, SRH came out all guns blazing to record a second victory of the season over Rajasthan Royals.

Abhishek Sharma will be keen to make the most of his form after a quiet T20 World Cup. With 380 runs at a strike rate of 212.29, averaging 54.28 with one century and three fifties, the India T20I opener is back to his best.

Ishan Kishan (312) and Heinrich Klaassen (349) have again fired with the bat providing further strength to the 2016 winners, but more will be expected from Travis Head (186) who has had a quiet IPL so far. (PTI)

England name squad for Women's T20 World Cup



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
London

All-rounder Nat Sciver-Brunet will lead the 15-member England squad in the upcoming 2026 ICC Women's T20 World Cup, the ECB announced on Tuesday. The same England squad led by Sciver-Brunet will also feature in the preceding series against India and New Zealand in May-June. This will be Sciver-Brunet's seventh appearance at the global T20 event.

The India women's team is touring England for three T20Is and a one-off Test at Lord's. The T20Is are scheduled for late May/early June, while the Test match runs from July 10-13, marking 50 years since the first England women's match at the hallowed venue.

The new name in the England squad was uncapped 18-year-old Surrey spinner Tilly Corteen-Coleman, Warwickshire's Issy Wong and Durham's Lauren Filer who have all received maiden T20 World Cup call-ups.

Surrey's Danni Wyatt-Hodge will play in her eighth T20 World Cup edition. Somerset's Charlie Dean is the vice-captain and joins a list of impressive all-round

cricketers in the squad, with Hampshire fast bowler Lauren Bell set to lead the attack.

Head coach Charlotte Edwards, who captained the side in their victorious 2009 T20 World Cup campaign — also in England — will have more than 960 caps worth of T20 international experience to pick from during the tournament that begins on June 12 at Edgbaston.

And as women's cricket seeks to use the platform of a home World Cup to break into mainstream conversation, stars from across the sporting and entertainment landscape have played their part in revealing the 15 names with a unique announcement film.

Edwards said: "The waiting and wondering is over, we have named our ICC Women's T20 World Cup squad and there is no doubt that it has been incredibly tough to get to these 15 names.

"This is the hardest set of selection meetings I have been a part of because the pool of players to choose from is so strong and so many talented players have put their hand up to be a part of the squad, which is exactly what we want.

Batters don't practice enough against hard lengths: Steyn



PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
New Delhi

After Delhi Capitals' stunning collapse, South African great Dale Steyn said modern batters are not preparing enough for hard lengths, a flaw exposed by Josh Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar Kumar in the IPL on Monday night.

Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar ripped apart the Delhi Capitals' batting line-up by taking six wickets in first four overs, helping Royal Challengers Bengaluru dismiss DC for a mere 75 in 16.3 overs. Steyn said batters are not scared anymore but they just do not practice enough for the lengths that the likes of Hazlewood, Bhuvneshwar, Kagiso Rabada and Jofra Archer tend to bowl.

"Watching Buvu, Hazlewood, throw KG and Archer in there too, there's a genuine fear from batters not because they scared,



but they know exactly where these greats are going to bowl but don't practice enough in that area to have answers," (sic) Steyn wrote on X.

"The fear is technical skill, too deep into the tournament to change now, watch these bowlers continue to dominate. Its called a HARD length for a reason," (sic) Steyn added.

Former South African batter Herschelle Gibbs gave the batting

perspective to Steyn's observations, saying that batters do not charge against bowlers down the pitch enough against these bowlers to disturb their lengths.

"No batter keen to run at them to get them off their lengths," Gibbs replied.

Delhi Capitals, who had slipped to 8 for six at one stage, eventually crawled to 13 for six after six overs to record the lowest-ever powerplay score in the IPL.

India lose to China to end campaign in Uber Cup finals

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
Horsens (Denmark)

Two-time Olympic medallist PV Sindhu squandered a strong position as India failed to capitalise on chances, going down 0-5 to China to end their campaign at the Uber Cup Finals here.

The Indian women's team had opened with a 2-3 loss to hosts Denmark before bouncing back with a 4-1 win over Ukraine.

China, the most successful team in Uber Cup history with 16 titles, was always going to be a formidable opponent, with India having lost to them three times in their last three major ties. While Sindhu remained the leader of the group, Isharani Baruah and Devika Sihag were drafted in place of Unnati Hooda and Tanvi Sharma for the other two singles.

Sindhu raised hopes as she looked set for a statement win before letting slip an 18-12 lead in the decider to go down 16-21, 21-19, 19-21 to world Number 2 Wang Zhiyi in the opening



singles, handing China a 1-0 lead in the must-win Group A tie on Monday.

It would have taken a miracle to upset the defending champions thereafter and, though the young Indian shuttlers showed fight, they lacked the

finishing touch and faltered at crucial moments. Priya Konjengbam and Shruti Mishra were no match for world Number 1 pair Liu Sheng Shu and Tan Ning, losing 11-21, 8-21 in the first doubles.

WFI bars U-17 wrestler over dual birth certificates



AMANPREET SINGH
New Delhi

The Wrestling Federation of India (WFI) has barred an under-17 wrestler from competing on the opening day of the National Championships in Sambhajinagar after her father produced two birth certificates from different states, exposing glaring gaps in document verification by the administration.

The wrestler (name withheld), who sought to participate in the women's 57kg cat-

egory for Madhya Pradesh, was stopped during scrutiny after officials found discrepancies in her birth records.

According to documents accessed by PTI, one birth certificate issued by authorities in Madhya Pradesh lists the date of birth as August 26, 2010, but shows the date of registration and issue as November 16, 2021: more than a decade after the birth.

The certificate mentions a Sheopur district address and was generated through a gram panchayat office.